This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07485786 7

WHEN ROGUES FALL OUT

BY

JOSEPH HATTON

When Rogues Fall Out

A Romance of Old London

By

Joseph Hatton

Author of "When Greek Meets Greek," "The Banishment of Jessop Blythe," "The Vicar," etc.

THE PROPERTY OF THE NEW-YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

Philadelphia
J. B. Lippincott Company
1899

PUBLIC LIBRARY
104968B

COPYRIGHT, 1899,
BY
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.

ELECTROTYPED AND PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

Dedicated to

Weedon Grossmith,

In Token of a Life-long Friendship and in Recognition of an Artistic Effort to Impersonate on the Stage "the Real Jack Sheppard."

TO THE READER

WHILE I do not feel called upon to apologise for this romance of love and crime, I am tempted to offer a few words by way of preface, in order to anticipate possible objections on the part of those stern moralists who proclaim such works as "Jack Sheppard," "Oliver Twist," "Paul Clifford," and "Eugene Aram," detrimental to the mind of youth. It should not, however, be forgotten that these famous novels were not written as text-books for schools. Nor is this present effort to illustrate a certain phase of the life of Old London intended as an exemplary study of social and moral ethics. "Sandford and Merton" supplies, to the ingenuous youth of the nation, all it can possibly require in that direction. The chief aim of the novelist is the entertainment of his reader. At the same time, it must be confessed that there are no more powerful lessons among those that make for virtue than may be found in the historic records of crime.

In the most engrossing pages of the literature of fiction, from Goethe's "Faust" and Shakespeare's "Othello" down to Hugo's "Notre Dame" and Dickens's "Edwin Drood," there has always been a conspicuous villain among the *dramatis personæ;* the more astute and malicious the more fascinating, and the better, by way of contrast, for emphasising the virtues of the honest and the true. Hitherto, by both the story-teller and the dramatist, Jonathan Wild has been presented in the light of a commonplace and vulgar ruffian; on the stage, with a patch over his eye and a bludgeon in his

hand; in the novel, as the boon companion of his lowest and most abandoned servants; as if a great general should go out and get drunk with his meanest subaltern.

Not with a view to whitewash a notorious criminal, but with a desire to give him his rightful place in the gallery of the world's most accomplished villains, I have overhauled his biography, and, in so doing, am glad to have found myself in the excellent company of Mr. Charles Whibley, in "A Book of Scoundrels," and Mr. Arthur Vincent, in "Twelve Bad Men," the newest volumes on one of the oldest subjects. Jonathan Wild rose from the gutter. Many another famous man has done the same; and, having risen, has treated assisting hands with as little gratitude. The great Duke of Wellington, in one of his critical moods, spoke of Napoleon as the "Jonathan Wild of Imperial France." Fielding made him a peg for satire. The truth, or thereabouts, will be found in the following pages, which portray Master Wild as a man of wit and intellectual resource, an accomplished and unscrupulous diplomatist, combining with the cunning of an Old Bailey lawyer the cruelty of a Spanish Inquisitor. As a man, his character represents no redeeming feature; unless a certain gift of *gourmandise* and an undaunted, if misplaced, courage may be counted to his honour. In their impersonations of "Louis XI." both Charles Kean and Sir Henry Irving treated that grim villain as if they loved him. Charles Dickens read his story of "Bill Sykes" in the same appreciative spirit; wherein I find for myself an excuse for being somewhat overborne by the weird fascination of "the Machiavel of thieves."

In addition to Jack Sheppard and the notorious thief-maker and thief-taker, it should be remembered that Joseph Blake, otherwise "Blueskin"; Elizabeth Lyons, better known as "Edgeworth Bess"; Owen Wood,

James Hichen, and the officers of Newgate in their day are more or less historical personages. Fiction is most convincing when it is built upon a solid foundation of fact. While I have added to these characters such creations as Dolly Cooke and Peter Ferrish, and selected from the "Newgate Calendar" such "gallants of the road" as Tom Reynolds and Bill Horton for heroes, and given to fate an ally against the ultimate triumph of villainy in a new Quilt Arnold, I have in all things endeavoured to echo "the true ring and music of the time."

If it be permitted for "a woman of easy virtue," so-called, to possess some of the highest attributes of her sex, as eminent novelists and historians have claimed, I ask for the indulgence and sympathy of the reader in favour of Dolly Cooke. It is possible that the strictest censor may find a further redemption for this romance of criminal life in the love story of Ellaline Wood and Eric Beryl; and it is no small justification for such a contribution to the literature of fiction that "the picturesque humanity of Newgate" long ago appealed to the art of the painter and the sensibility of the poet, and may well, therefore, once more find favour with the novelist and his friendly constituency.

Acknowledging the assistance I have received in the construction of "When Rogues Fall Out," from many records of fact and some works of fiction, I am greatly indebted to Harrison Ainsworth's "Jack Sheppard," more especially for suggestions that belong to the tragic intrigues of Sir Patrick Brent, though they are not altogether foreign to "the romances of our great families." In the course of my investigations I have requisitioned the "Newgate Calendar," and many volumes of other judicial chronicles of crime that deal with such remarkable characters as Captain Kyd, Hind, Avery, and Mac-

heath, "Moll Cutpurse," James Maclean, "Jennie Diver," Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, "Sixteen-String-Jack," Dick Adams, "Edgeworth Bess," Joseph Blake, Poll Maggot, and their associates and contemporaries (and I mention them out of the sequence of dates, as they have fallen under my notice); besides consulting certain records of Wych Street, Newgate, and Tyburn, the mysteries of the Mint, the Friars, and Alsatia generally; together with stray notes concerning Hockley-in-the-Hole, Ranelagh, and other kindred resorts, now obliterated by busy streets and centres of trade; not, at the same time, overlooking such pictorial, literary and historical authorities as Hogarth, Fielding, Macaulay, Knight, and Whitehead; but above all, the frank and independent reports of the chapbook and broad-sheet publications of the period, with their supplementary biographies, letters, and last dying speeches of the most notorious bandits, cracksmen, forgers, highwaymen, thieves, and murderers whom righteous judges transported to Van Dieman's Land, or condemned to "the gallows tree" of Tyburn.

The pioneer of new worlds has many miserable and malarious experiences before he achieves his promised land. So it is with the literary traveller who pushes his way through the criminal records of a great city, to emerge therefrom with his novel or his essay. To-day you cannot fail to come through the ordeal with the conviction that the world is far cleaner, healthier, and better in every respect than it was in the days of Jonathan Wild, when prisoners who refused to plead were pressed to death at Newgate, and Tyburn was alike the playground and the gallows of criminal London.

J. H.

GARRICK CLUB, *September*, 1899.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—Two Lovers and a Maid	11
II.—Jonathan Wild	17
III.—The Story of a Crime	22
IV.—Diamond cut Diamond	33
V.—Rogues in Council and One a Petticoat	49
VI.—Jack Sheppard at Wych Street	61
VII.—Blueskin carries a Message to Jack from Edgeworth Bess	73
VIII.—White Lies and Others	79
IX.—Jack Sheppard makes a Startling Discovery	88
X.—A House of Mystery	96
XI.—"Arcades Ambo"	100
XII.—A Grim Love Story	109
XIII.—Jack Sheppard makes the Acquaintance of Edgeworth Bess	115
XIV.—The Prison-Breaker's First Exploit	122
XV.—A Night at Preston's Bear-Garden	131
XVI.—The Battle of Hockley-in-the-Hole	140
XVII.—Truth, Tradition, and the Eccentricities of Love	148
XVIII.—On Board the "Fairlight"	154
XIX.—Edgeworth Bess and Mistress Cooke in Wild's Stone-Parlour	163
XX.—Recalls Quilt's Curious Exclamation, "Rats!"	173
XXI.—Blueskin objects to Wild's Parables	181

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII.—Illustrates the Fallacy of the Proverb that there is "Honour among Thieves"	187
XXIII.—An Unexpected and Romantic Meeting	193
XXIV.—From Wych Street to Merry Islington	199
XXV.—On the Best Time to crack a Crib	211
XXVI.—Eric Beryl's Escape	227
XXVII.—Ellaline Wood and Sheppard meet again	229
XXVIII.—The Beginning of a Busy Day	237
XXIX.—Jonathan Wild discourses on Hypocrisy to Wood and Eric Beryl	246
XXX.—A Compact with Quilt Arnold	250
XXXI.—Murdered with the "Weapon of a Gentleman"	256
XXXII.—In the Castle Cell of Newgate	261
XXXIII.—And Afterwards	271
XXXIV.—"Rats!" and the Missing Packet	275
XXXV.—On the Way to the "Cross Shovels"	279
XXXVI.—"A Great Occasion"	283
XXXVII.—An Eventful Night	295
XXXVIII.—Blueskin keeps his Word	302
XXXIX.—The Reckoning	310

When Rogues Fall Out

CHAPTER I

TWO LOVERS AND A MAID

SHE stood between two lovers—one worthy, the other unworthy; one the Idle Apprentice, the other the Industrious—all three unhappy with the vague discontent of youth.

The dreams of youth make the Christian's heaven an easy faith. To be beautiful and seventeen is to know something of the bliss of the angels. If Youth did not look forward, envious of the authority that comes with years, Age would find no charm in memory, and that would make Age a desolation. So they dreamed their dreams, these young people, in their prosaic if picturesque environment of Wych Street, when George the First was king.

Ellaline Wood dreamed of life without a step-mother; Eric Beryl dreamed of Ellaline; Jack Sheppard dreamed of a freedom that knew no law of apprenticeship, and whose dominant password was "Stand and deliver!"

In the eyes of Age there is nothing more pathetic than Youth; Age knows how many pitfalls must beset its path. If Youth would be advised, old Age might be the happier, but the spirit of enterprise would be tamed down to inaction, and Fiction would have to be its own

inventor of enterprise and love. If these three young people, who are at their happiest in this opening chapter, could only have seen through the mist of the road upon which they were travelling! But Fate is kind, and many a great thinker believes in Destiny.

Jack Sheppard had received sufficient education to enable him to become intimately acquainted with a class of literature that is represented in our own day by what is stigmatised as "The Penny Dreadful" or "The Shilling Shocker." He loved the romance of "The Road," the last dying speeches of notorious cracksmen, and the adventures of Claude Duval. Tradition has it that his father was hanged. On the contrary, his father was an honest carpenter, and died in his bed, respected, though poor. Jack was the youngest of his two sons, and, after a short probation in the shop of a cane-chairmaker, was apprenticed to his father's trade, his master being Mr. Owen Wood, of Wych Street.* It was one Joseph

---

* "Jack Sheppard was born in Spitalfields in the year 1702. His father (who died the year following the birth of this, his youngest son) was a carpenter, and had the character of an honest man, though his two sons, Thomas the eldest and Jack the famous, both turned out arrant knaves. As to Jack, his mother tried to place him in the Bluecoat Hospital, failing which she put him to school to one Garret, within Bishopsgate; here he continued two years, and learnt to read and write. Then he was apprenticed to a cane-chairmaker in Houndsditch, but his master dying, Mr. Kneebone, a woollen draper, having known old Sheppard, the father, took Jack in until he could be provided with another master. Kneebone improved him in writing and accompts, and finally bound him apprentice to Owen Wood, a carpenter of credit and position in Wych Street, where he behaved himself pretty well for four or five years, and then fell into bad company."—*Old Bailey Trials*, 1742.

"The claims of heredity receive no support in the history of

Blake, known by the sobriquet of "Blueskin," who called Jack "The Idle Apprentice"; not that the lad was idle in the worst sense. He was apt, learnt his trade quickly, added to it the mysteries of the locksmith, and was entrusted by his master with many difficult and important jobs; a bright, active, if cunning lad, with beady eyes, close-cropped black hair, a mouth that smiled easily, and a laugh that was pleasant, though it was more of a chuckle than a laugh. Jack did not know that he loved his master's daughter. It is possible that he was not born with a high capacity for loving. He would have made a better soldier than a carpenter, and probably a better sailor than either; though given a knowledge of the sea, he would probably have become a pirate instead of a highwayman, cracksman, and prison-breaker. In any case the lad would have made a name. He had that restless ambition and ingenuity that belong to men who, rising from the ranks, achieve wealth or distinction. At the moment of our introduction to the entertaining young scamp, he was secretly matriculating for the career in which he was afterwards to become notorious.

His companion and fellow-apprentice, Eric Beryl, not only loved his master's daughter, Ellaline, but knew it to his cost. It kept him awake at night. There was a mystery concerning his birth and parentage, which, however, had never troubled him until he found Ellaline continually in his thoughts. Then he began to dream of winning a position for himself that should enable him to lay both name and fortune at her dainty feet and ask in return her pretty white hand. Unknown to himself,

---

the Sheppard family, and gratitude is not conspicuous in the character of Sheppard, whose first important 'burgle' was at the house of his first benefactor, Mr. Kneebone."—*Crime and Criminals*, 1875.

Eric was the heir to titles and estates in Derbyshire. He was the lost heir, not wandering all over the world as was the lot of the lost heir of Charles Reade's romance, nor having the advantage of a long residence in France such as fell to the lot of the heir to the Traffords and Trenchards in Harrison Ainsworth's exciting chronicle. All the life he knew he had lived with Owen Wood, first as his adopted son, then as his apprentice until within the last two years of his indentures, when he had lodged with a neighbour in Drury Lane, by reason of the precaution deemed necessary both by Mr. and Mrs. Wood in the interest of their daughter.

It had become apparent to Wood that Master Eric had fallen in love with Ellaline, and Wood thought it wise that they should no longer see each other every five minutes. Eric was taller than Jack, less alert, spoke with an air of authority, dressed with greater care than his friend, had a firmer mouth, and well became his finer clothes. He had learnt his trade in a leisurely protesting kind of way, as if he merely condescended to the plane and the chisel. At the same time he kept his hours faithfully, and was entitled to be considered an honest and industrious apprentice. He was Mrs. Wood's favourite. She compared him continually with Jack, to the disadvantage of the latter, which may probably have had its influence upon young Mistress Ellaline Wood's regard for the more lowly-born apprentice, for she was of a sympathetic nature. She admired Eric, and in her heart loved Jack; but she was not as conscious of her love as Eric of his. Young people often are unaware of the exact nature of their affections, until one day there is a parting, and "Goodbye" comes with tears, and absence with uncontrollable grief. This is probably the same with old people in regard to a less selfish love than the sexual passion.

Ellaline Wood was made to be loved. She was one of those fresh, healthy, genial girls who win hearts unconsciously. It seemed as if God had made her to brighten Wych Street and make life worth having to all who had the good fortune to see her every day. She was well known in the regions round about Wych Street, in Drury Lane, the Strand, Holborn, and in Covent Garden, not to mention the Park on Sundays and in the church, where she was a regular attendant with her father and step-mother. Eric frequently accompanied them to morning service, and walked home with Ellaline on his arm, very proud of himself and still more so of his pretty companion, who was the admired of all admirers. She had a way of putting out her pretty foot that reminded Eric of the dainty step of the pigeons that came flying about her from the Temple; and if a high instep betokened high birth, then young Mistress Wood must have had a noble ancestor; not that old Wood himself was by any means plebeian in his manner or appearance. His wife—she was his second—on the other hand, was of very common clay; the earthenware that fancies itself porcelain, the ugly duckling that really is an ugly duckling, and has not the remotest relationship with the swan. Ellaline could not help being somewhat of a flirt. She was gifted with all the little tricks and pretty ways of a charming femininity; and she was vastly pretty —as the young bucks said who saw her at church: "Vastly pretty, by the Mass!"

She had a complexion that had been likened to peaches and cream; but we will call it the healthful colour of a typical English lass—rosy, unblemished, with red lips, a round, dimpled chin, a pair of dark blue eyes with heavy drooping lashes, hair that grew low on the forehead, low and curly, not formally curly, but fussily curly, without uniformity, and it was gathered high upon her head in a

great bunch from which fell stray tendrils, as if to sample it and give assurance that the abundance was genuine. You would have described her figure as perfect, unless you had been led astray by the artificialities of modiste-made waists bound with whalebone inventions that induce consumption and other deadly ills.

They made a strikingly picturesque trio, these young people, engaged in a dinner-hour gossip among the shavings and sawdust of Wood's shop. Even in those days, when there was a pleasant individuality in every man and woman's dress, and in all something that was artistic in form and colour, even then Eric, Jack, and Ellaline would have arrested attention. From the standpoint of the present day, with never a square-cut coat, nor a cocked hat, nor a pair of knee-breeches, nor a flowing wig and three-cornered cap among us, nor for women the dainty prints and fichus, nor buckled shoes, nor bunched ringlets, nor the dozen other fascinating details of those wild, reckless, and adventurous days, the three youngsters of this history would appear attractive beyond description. They were talking of all manner of things that are foreign to the present time, both as to dress and occurrences. It is not so very long ago ; and yet the pistol was quite a modern invention. It had, however, become quickly popular, more especially among the gentry with whose exploits Jack Sheppard was most familiar. He had been telling Eric and Ellaline all the particulars he had learnt from a Newgate leaflet of the last hours of a notorious pirate, and of the stopping of the newest and fastest coach from Bath, an incident of the previous day which had been related to him—by whom he did not say ; his visits to a certain notorious tavern hard by were among his secret recreations. Eric, in his authoritative manner, had rebuked Jack for taking so much interest in these criminal affairs. Ellaline had

defended him, while at the same time counselling him with her eyes more than in words to give his thoughts to the adventures of better and braver men. Eric thought the fight at Preston a far more worthy subject than a highwayman's adventure at Hounslow, or a buccaneer's battle at sea, and he fell to recalling some exciting details of Lord Nithsdale's remarkable escape from Newgate in woman's clothes. This roused Jack's enthusiasm, and planted in his mind suggestions of a disguise he might adopt himself if ever he had such pressing need as the Jacobin lord to deceive the keepers of the great city prison. Ellaline, standing with her back against a carpenter's bench, Jack cross-legged upon a trestle, Eric on the other side of the girl, leaning over the end of the bench, stealing furtive glances at her and watching every changing pose of her pretty head, caught the sunshine as it streamed in from the window overlooking Wych Street; and here we may leave them for the present, while we make the reader fully acquainted with the evil genius of the time, whose shadow was destined to fall upon the otherwise happy lives of the belle of Wych Street and her two apprentice lovers.

CHAPTER II

JONATHAN WILD

JONATHAN WILD was a cynic. He was also a thief. The public business, however, which he professed to follow was the capture of thieves and the hanging thereof. He was successful in both these directions, and is noted in history as the most daring of middlemen. "If you question me about thieves," he said to one who sought

his aid in a delicate matter of robbery, "I have nothing to say to you, but that I can give a good account of myself. My name is Wild, and I live in Cock-alley, by Cripplegate, where you may find me any day in the week; and so, sir, your humble servant." Some goods had been offered in pawn by a suspected person. The broker had had the honesty to stop them, and if the gentleman who had been robbed was willing to treat, well; if not, why then no harm was done; and Jonathan, with a shrug of his shoulders, was quite willing to let the business go; but the loser soon came to the thief-taker's terms. Jonathan was not only the principal detective, and in league for a time with the City Marshal in blackmailing operations as middleman between robber and robbed, but he was the all-prevailing chief and director of the bandits of the day, highwaymen, shoplifters, forgers, burglars, and dealers in stolen goods. Not long content with Cock-alley, he removed to the more convenient locality of the Old Bailey, where he lived in good style, had several courses for dinner, drank choice wines, wore fine clothes, sported a rapier by his side, and in his pocket carried a silver staff with a crown on it, supposed to be an official symbol of his high office, and tolerated by the authorities as an unofficial pass into evil quarters where it might be difficult for the King's warrant to run.

Beginning his London career in prison, he made many useful acquaintances and friends. They included a lady of free and easy manners, who for a time was a useful ally in laying in a foundation of knowledge that made Wild master of all the various resources of criminal activity. He soon knew every thief in town, their haunts, habits, and methods. First coming to their assistance as a receiver, he eventually made them his servants. He not only had an office where those who had lost anything made known their troubles, but it was also the head-

quarters of communication with the criminals who had committed the depredations of which the others had to complain. For the plundered it was a kind of exchange. Having paid a fee of five shillings, they stated the nature of their loss. The details were duly entered in day-books and ledgers by knowing clerks ; and Mr. Wild undertook to do his best to recover the property. In most cases he was successful, his commission was gladly paid, and he had many grateful clients. He knew well enough at the outset where to lay his hands on the stolen goods; and if he did not, then he had been juggled with by some impertinent thief, whom he at once unmasked and hunted to death. His employés, as a rule, from their introduction into his service, were working with "the rope round their necks." When they rebelled, Jonathan soon placed the hangman at the other end of it, and society thanked him for bringing another scoundrel to justice. He did this work of "the blind lady with the scales" in a manner no less completely than that of "honest broker" as between my lord who had lost his family plate and the cracksman who had carried it off. It happened now and then that hardly had his lordship replaced the precious store in the family chests than the same thief made a second levy ; but, fortunately, Mr. Wild had an inkling of the villainy, and duly ferreted out the place where the plate was hidden, so that it was once more restored to his lordship, the second time without much trouble and at less expense, while Jonathan had promised his outraged lordship that the thief should not go unpunished.

Not only had this extraordinary man an exchange, where lost jewels, plate, deeds, notes, and property of all kinds, merchandise, linen goods, woollens, were registered as lost and paid for on restoration, he established a kind of thieves' college, where robbery as a fine art was taught by professors. It was no miserable hole

such as Fagin's in "Oliver Twist," but of an altogether higher grade. The students were instructed in the ways and manners of the town, some for one line of business, some for another. Masters of deportment turned out gallants who played the part of bucks at Ranelagh and Vauxhall, and made many valuable prizes of watches, purses, snuff-boxes, and even swords; others learnt how to become gentlemen's servants, footmen, and the like, obtaining by forged characters and other introductions situations in good families, whereby the secrets of their accessible wealth were exploited for the use and benefit of the well-instructed and capable housebreaker. Tuition was not confined to male students. Cynic though he was, Jonathan had a soft heart for the fair sex. He married several of them, and is said to have lived more or less comfortably with one who was "quite a decent kind of body," and no doubt thought all the world of her masterful husband, with his sword by his side, his silver staff, and his liberal table. At one time he had warehouses in which his assistants stored the stolen goods brought in by his army of operators. When the Government began to wake up to the vast business that was done in the way of "receiving," and sought to check it by Act of Parliament, he invested in a sloop and did business on the sea between the Thames and the ports of Holland. He was a man of remarkable resource, a keen and subtle diplomat, and had a pretty wit, as is shown by the pamphlet he wrote in reply to an exposure printed against him by his confederate in crime, Hichen, the City Marshal. This ruffian Hichen, at the opening of Wild's active career, discovering in him qualities that might be of value in extending his own surveillance of the thieves, footpads, housebreakers, disorderly women, and keepers of houses of ill-fame, from whom he exacted toll, invited Wild to become his offi-

cial assistant. Wild readily accepted the post. It was of vast importance to obtain such authoritative recognition of his work; and the two ran well in harness together until Wild became of more importance to law and lawlessness than the dominant partner. Hichen was a gross, burly villain, ramping about in a silver-buttoned coat, and clanking a heavy sword, but overshadowed by Wild he came to be regarded by the desperadoes and sneaks of the metropolis as a mere nobody compared with the great thief-taker, whose little silver staff was a veritable sceptre of fearful potency among evil-doers. Eventually, the two arch rogues falling out, they sought to blacken each other's characters, and pave the way for each other to the gallows. The Government and the police were too much occupied, one presumes, in other directions, to take the hint and make short work of the rival scoundrels. Jonathan even aspired to civic honours, and presently awakened jealousies more serious than those that racked the brutal vanity of the discredited Marshal.

When you think of the noted gallants of the road, the famous cracksmen, the daring burglars, the wily receivers, the police themselves, as merely the puppets of Jonathan Wild, who lived in state and rode in his coach, you realise that he was something more than the ordinary villain of Ainsworth's popular romance, masquerading with a patch on his eye in company with Blueskin, similarly "disguised." * One can only stand and wonder at him.

* "His meanest action marked him out from his fellows, but it was not until he habitually pillaged the treasures he afterwards restored to their grateful owners for a handsome consideration that his art reached the highest point of excellence. The event was managed by him with amazing adroitness from beginning to end. It was he who discovered the wealth and habit of the victim; it was he who posted the thief and seized

He kept a company of artists to alter the marks on watches and snuff-boxes and re-engrave old plate, so as to take these things out of the way of identification, and make them saleable property. Now and then he made a friend for life of some eminent person by obtaining for him the restoration of valuable property without fee or charge of any kind, pretending that he worked more for the love of justice and the fame of a master of his craft than for mere sordid gain. He was bitterly resentful of opposition, nevertheless; obdurate, merciless, a fiend in taking his revenge where he had been thwarted and made light of by one of his gang; cruel, remorseless, unforgiving, a black-hearted villain.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF A CRIME

"You think you are dying," said Mr. Jonathan Wild.

"I know it," the man replied.

"And a grateful impulse prompts you to make a confession in my interest?"

---

the plunder, giving a paltry commission to his hirelings for their trouble; it was he who kept whatever valuables were lost in the transaction; and as he was the servant of the Court discovery or inconvenience was impossible. Surely the Machiavel of Thieves is in his case a justifiable title. He was known to all the rich and titled folk in town; and if he was generally able to give them back their stolen valuables at something more than double their value, he treated his clients with a most proper insolence. . . . In fifteen years he claimed £10,000 for his dividend of recovered plunderings, and who shall estimate the moneys which flowed to his treasury from black-mail and the robberies of his gang."—*A Book of Scoundrels*, by Charles Whibley, 1897.

"Yes," the man answered, disclosing from beneath the bed-clothes a packet of papers tied with a ribbon, attached to which was a wax seal.

The notorious thief-taker and conspirator put forth his hand.

"Be patient, Mr. Wild," said the man, withdrawing the packet. "You have saved my life; I am going to repay you."

"You give me a new sensation, Master Ferrish. I have yet to discover the truth of the proverb that there is honesty among thieves, let alone gratitude. Go on, my friend; you never had a more interested auditor."

Wild offered his snuff-box to the dying man, who gently put it aside.

"As you please," said Wild, inhaling a mighty pinch, and then deliberately brushing the lapel of his rich brown coat with his no less rich silk handkerchief.

"You are fond of the lad Jack Sheppard?" queried Ferrish.

"I am fond of all mankind," said Jonathan, evasively.

"You've shown him many favours; perhaps that is your way of bringing him to the gallows," said the man, emphasizing his words with a hollow cough.

"You are merry in your last hours, I will not say sarcastic, Ferrish. What's the game?"

"That's how you led me on, Master Wild," the man answered, regardless of Wild's mocking inquiry; "but you have saved me, so I am content. You have mistaken the lad, if you think he is the heir to the title and estates of Brent."

"Oh, indeed," said Wild. "I thought I was sufficiently acquainted with Jack Sheppard, though his existence, since he was an infant until a week or two ago, was unknown to me." Which, oddly enough, was the truth.

"At first I had myself come to think he was the lad,"

said Ferrish, in a wandering way, as if unconscious of Wild's presence. "I must have been a fool not to have been struck with the other one's likeness to the father; but I only see him a time or two, and there was more of the devil in the Sheppard lad, and that was more kin to him than gentility. Besides, neither of them had a name to guess by."

"You are dreaming, eh?" said Wild, as Ferrish sank back on the pillow.

"Yes; dreaming of eighteen years ago," said the man, with a far-reaching look in his eyes and a nervous twitching of the lips.

"Well, dream on, if that's your method of confession," said Wild, once more consulting his snuff-box and offering it to the dying man, who did not observe the mechanical courtesy.

"I was Patrick Brent's slave—loved him as if he'd been my own son, and I was just old enough to be his father. I was his tutor, valet, groom, everything to him. An orphan, with no kith or kin, I put all my heart into his service; fool that I was! There was nothing in which I did not aid and abet him. When his father died he disinherited him of all but the title of baronet, that he could not alienate, and made his sister Jane mistress of all his possessions. For that he hated his sister, and persecuted her. He might have done whatever had pleased him had he been kind to her, for she was a sweet and gentle lady."

"It's a long story, Master Ferrish," said Wild, impatiently; but Ferrish heard him not: he was relieving his mind of a burden, and forging a shot against the master who had ill-treated him.

"At Brentfield there was a certain dashing young fellow, Sir Martin Waller, who fell in love with Mistress Jane Brent, and who was in consequence insulted and

contemned by Sir Patrick, her brother. A feud sprung up, and ultimately Sir Martin Waller and Mistress Jane eloped. Offspring of such a union would put still further back any possible claim of my disinherited master to the estates; so you may conceive how mad with rage he was against his sister and Sir Martin, whose throat he vowed he would cut. And God forgive us all, he did it!"

"Ah, now we are coming to business," said Wild, with a grim chuckle.

"After the elopement nothing was heard of the runaways for eighteen months. They were traced from place to place by Sir Patrick, and I accompanied him; the intervals of his search were passed in dissipation and debauchery. One day, after we had returned to his lodging, near Brentfield—for he had been turned out of every corner of his irate father's house and estates—he burst into my room, exclaiming, 'I've found the devils; saddle horses; we'll grab 'em; I'll kill 'em both, curse 'em!' And we rides and rides, and draws rein never, until we were dead beat. We must have put up in London a mort of days; seemed weeks, he was so impatient. At last we hired a boat—it was near by Erith—and rowing across the river we came to a cottage, and one night, after we'd spied about a good deal, we saw my fine gentleman, Sir Martin, sitting by the fire, Mistress Brent on one side, rocking a cradle with one hand and holding Sir Martin's with the other, a picture of domestic happiness, as you might have looked for in a common couple, but not with blood like that. Well——"

"Damme, man, get on! Spare your sentimental comment," interrupted Wild.

"Did you never hear of the lost heir to the great Derbyshire property of the Brents?"

"Yes," said Wild, betraying for the first time a real interest in Ferrish's confession.

"She was rocking it in that cradle," said Ferrish, an effort to emphasize the point bringing on a violent fit of coughing.

"You have the gift of subtlety," said Wild, "which, in my ignorance, I put down to an inconsequential wandering; you have a surprise for me, and wish to give it the force of a dramatic denouement. Ferrish, forgive my want of appreciation."

Once more he offered his snuff-box, and once more Ferrish declined it, having little more breath left than he needed for the ordinary purposes of his brief remaining lease of life.

"After contemplating this scene of happiness for a few minutes," continued the dying man, "my master, Sir Patrick, unlatched the door and broke in upon the couple, crying, 'Villain! seducer!' and before Sir Martin had time to defend himself, Sir Patrick had run him through and seized the child, thrusting it into my arms, and bade me fly to the boat; we had rowed it across ourselves, not wishing to enlarge our secret, as Sir Patrick put it, and I remember his very words. Sir Patrick was after me in a few minutes, and leaping into the boat shoved her off, and we were afloat. We hadn't got well into the tideway, when he snatches the child from my arms, and with an oath he says, "To hell, you bastard, and seek your father!' and flings the child into the river. 'My God!' I exclaimed, 'what have you done? Was not one murder enough?' Hardly were the words out of my mouth, when he suddenly seized me from behind and pinioned my arms as if they had been in a vice. 'No, damn you, one isn't enough where two are necessary, or three or four!' It seemed as if he spoke in another voice, a devilish, fiendish voice; and he had the strength of twenty men. I struggled for a moment; then he loosed me, but only for the purpose of striking me. 'Dead

men tell no tales,' were the last words I heard, and then, with a blow, I was hurled into the river."

"The devil you were!" said Wild. "By the weights and scales of Madame Justice, but your Sir Patrick is a true villain! It's the only way; half measures are no good in that business. Does the fellow still live? But of course he does; villainy thrives by clearing its path from obstructives."

"Sir Patrick Brent lives, and is rich, thanks to his plotting for the Pretender and an investment in South Sea Stock; but he still hankers after the estates of Brent, and I have lately tortured his soul with the anonymous information of the existence of his sister's son, the rightful heir to both title and estates."

Then Ferrish was afflicted with a serious spasm of coughing, which excited the anxiety of Wild to such an extent that he raised the man's head and presently administered to him water with a dash of brandy, the latter from a flask he invariably carried with his pistols.

"Where was I?" said Ferrish. "You interrupted me."

"And I ask your pardon," said Wild.

"It was when he flung me into the river? Yes; I know; am I ever likely to forget, until I am dead? It was lucky, or providential, may I say—and pray God, I may, as I hope to be forgiven—that the moon shone out, else I would not have been seen. I was picked up by a boatman, who had just rescued the child and was hanging on by a boat-hook to a barge that was moored with other craft almost mid-stream, an unusual thing, they said, as if it might have been done on purpose by Providence, because the infant was caught atop of the tide, its clothes buoying it up, and although I was hit a heavy blow as I fell into the river, being a good swimmer, I struck out as if I'd all my senses. The boatman said he

was in luck; it was his business to keep a sharp look-out for waifs and strays, and flotsam and jetsam and the like. And there was a tradesman in the boat who had been aboard one of the craft, connected with some carpentering work, and he gave the boatman a guinea and took me and the child ashore and was very kind to us; and his name was——"

Then he coughed again, severely; and Wild, with a sneer, remarked, "Not a bit of it, Ferrish; I'm sure that was not his name."

"Wood," gasped the man, "his name was, and he has two apprentices, and the lad they call Eric Beryl, he's the heir to the Brent title and property—not Sheppard, mind you, the other one."

"Your hand, Ferrish," said Wild, taking the skinny fingers in his hard fist. "You are an honest fellow, and I'm glad I did not let you die on the gallows."

"Thank you, Mr. Wild. There was a locket round the child's neck and a name on its clothing; and Wood having no children of his own, his wife took a fancy to this one, and I took my oath never to say anything about it. And Wood, he gave me, for a long time, wages; and I might have lived happy and honest if I hadn't fallen in with some of your men at the 'Cross Shovels,' and then got employed by you. But there, we know not what we're born to."

"And whatever we are born to, we can't escape—unless we have a dear friend like Jonathan Wild, who steps in between Jack Ketch and his victim, and says, 'Stow it; this is a friend of mine.' Just so. Well, Ferrish, and the papers and the locket?"

"I was coming to that, Mr. Wild. Being so wickedly and ungratefully treated, I naturally longed for revenge. Nigh upon a month after I had been drowned, as my generous master thought, I disguised myself as a sailor,

and went and lodged at a tavern not far from the house where we had seen that happy picture of domestic felicity. The people told me that the lady had only just left. It had been unfortunate that her maid and the mistress of the house had gone out to spend the evening with a neighbour, that time the enraged brother had surprised them. After the disappearance of the child, in the arms of a man, she said, who was with him—which, of course, was myself—the brother returned. Mistress Brent, or Lady Martin Waller as she undoubtedly was, had laid insensible for a whole week. When they got home they found Sir Patrick Brent in attendance upon her, and her husband dead. Sir Patrick had despatched a messenger to Greenwich for a doctor. He explained to them that the man, Sir Martin, had vilely seduced and eloped with his sister, and that he had been long searching for them ; that on finding them here, Sir Martin flew at him with his sword ; they fought, and Sir Martin fell. What had surprised him was that, at the moment of the duel, a strange man rushed in and carried off the child. Nothing could, they said, have been more kind than Sir Patrick to his sister. He sat with her, helped to nurse her, and when her senses came back, questioned her. She could not recollect the circumstances as he described them, but charged him with murder and the robbery of her child. He was cut to the heart at her unsisterly ravings. Then he sent off messengers to Brent Hall, and in another week madame's housekeeper and other servants came. Sir Patrick handed her over to them and related his account of the affair, which they all believed, treating their mistress as mad. And so the affair ended."

"A villain as cunning as the Richard of Shakespeare," said Wild. "We must meet, most assuredly. A man I would like to cross swords with, Ferrish. It was a

wise thought to give me this introduction to him. You are better, Ferrish ; you are not going to die after all."

"I feel that I am speaking for the last time, Mr. Wild," said the poor fellow, his face, which had hitherto been pale and cadaverous, now flushed with feverish excitement.

"Well, proceed, my man. I am all attention."

"I forgot to say that the landlady of the house, where Sir Patrick killed his sister's husband, as I have told you," said Ferrish, the colour leaving his face and his eyes wandering from Wild to the bare walls of the cell-like apartment, "said also that his sister charged him with having broken into a small chest in her trunk and stolen papers and scrip belonging to her. This he put down, they said, to her unbalanced mind, brought about by the loss of her paramour and child ; whereat she had raved, and said, 'He was my lawful husband.' Well, it came to me, thinking the business over, that those papers would be of great value in any scheme against Sir Patrick. So in due time I went to the scene of my boyhood, at Brentfield, near Brent Hall, in Derbyshire. A mile or two from The Rookery there was a small house where Sir Patrick had lived ever since his father had disinherited him. I appeared as an old soldier fresh from the wars, and treated the folk with my bit of prize-money—your men at the 'Cross Shovels' and Hockley, Master Wild, put me up to plenty of easy fakes. And when everything was comfortable for the job, I cracked The Rookery, and come across the very papers he must have carried off as his sister claimed ; and it was plain that he had hoped so."

Here Ferrish raised his head, as if with a sudden revival of strength, and once more produced the packet of papers from beneath the bed-clothes, saying, "And here they are, Mr. Wild ; the marriage certificate of Jane

Brent and Martin Waller—though she can prove her marriage safe enough without it—but it's good to have it; a leaf from a book containing particulars of the registration of the birth of their son, named therein Thomas, an abstract of the will of the late Sir Randolph Brent, Sir Patrick and Jane Brent's father; and here are letters that prove Sir Patrick's close connection with a plot to restore James to the throne; implements and weapons that will avail you and Mr. Wood, if you combine to restore the lad Beryl to his rightful estate, to give Lady Waller a son, and to scourge Sir Patrick to your heart's content, and mine. And that ended, I feel as if I might live a little longer."

The confessing criminal, who had been hidden by Wild from the officers of the law, by whom he was wanted for offences committed in Wild's service, and which in those days were considered to merit the gallows, smiled with a weak flutter of hope and leaned back upon the pillow, his hand still clutching the papers that Wild was now in no hurry to seize, considering them as good as in his possession.

"That you feel better, Ferrish," said Wild, "is no doubt the concomitant of a good action;" at which the man looked up, with a feeble expression of gratitude that Wild immediately changed into an expression of horror.

Wild was cruel to his finger-tips, and they were bony and pointed, his hand strong, and with a tendency to close tight on anything; he even gripped his snuff-box as if he held it in a claw. Whether he only intended to terrify the dying man, or to carry out his threat, it is difficult to say; but he followed his soothing suggestion with the remark, "And now, Ferrish, if you are really not going to die peaceably in your bed, I had better call the warders and have you taken to Newgate, whence you will be removed in due course to take your trial at

Westminster; and the facts being proved against you, there will be a procession to Tyburn, you will quaff your liquor at the half-way house, and——"

"Mr. Wild!" gasped Ferrish, "Mr. Wild!" in such heart-rending tones that Wild, in a conciliatory spirit, refrained from finishing the sentence, but turned away, and called for Quilt.*

"Oh, Mr. Wild!—Mr. Wild!" the dying man continued to exclaim; and Wild again called Quilt, who did not respond on the instant, as was his wont.

"Quilt!" shouted Wild, impatiently; and at that moment a hand, from somewhere close by the bed, gripped the packet of papers and withdrew them; while almost on the instant Quilt entered, with "I beg your pardon, Mr. Wild, did you call me?"

"Did I call you! Damn you! Of course I called you!"

"I am sorry," said Quilt, humbly.

Then, turning to the invalid, who was staring speechless, as if into vacancy, Wild said, "What in thunder's the matter with you?"

The man made no reply; nor did he move.

Wild's eager eyes went to the coverlet of the bed, but the dying man's hand no longer clutched the priceless packet of papers.

---

* "Among his assistants, the most adroit and trusted was Quilt Arnold, whom he always addressed by his Christian name. He was invariably at Wild's elbow, and is supposed to have been one of the creatures Wild had saved from the gallows, and who lived in continual fear and trepidation. Wild's chief dread (as was that of Cartouche, the French rival of Jack Sheppard) lay in the direction of treachery, but to doubt was to slay, judicially: Tyburn was Wild's avenging minister. Quilt was no ordinary man."—*Select Trials*, 1724, and *Secrets of Newgate*, 1738.

"The packet—curse you!" he exclaimed, seizing the man by the shoulders and raising him up. "The packet? You idiot! beast! what have you done with it?"

The man never spoke a word, and when Wild released him he was dead.

CHAPTER IV

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

MR. WILD was a man of action. He lost no time in making the acquaintance of The Rookery and Brent Hall, both of which were tucked away among the northern hills of Derbyshire. It was a characteristic incident of his journey thither that he should have been requested to "Stand and deliver" by Tom Reynolds, one of his own people.

"Certainly, Tom, I will stand," said Wild, reining up his horse and facing the dashing highwayman, who, having for a time made Hounslow too hot for his adventures, had taken to the great North Road with marked success; "but it is you who will deliver." And Tom was covered on the instant by a brace of snappers, the shining barrels of which did not flash defiance more threateningly than the thief-taker's own bright eyes.

"What? Body o' me! Jonathan Wild!" exclaimed Reynolds.

"The same," said Wild. "I came to seek you."

"To seek me?"

"Since you have given the Old Bailey so wide a berth, the Old Bailey must needs come to the North."

"London is out of my beat just now."

"Turn your mare and ride with me a mile or two."

Tom pulled his mare around, and they both walked their horses.

"There are posts and coaches that carry messages," said Wild, taking advantage of the accidental meeting to suggest its diplomatic premeditation.

"You mean that——?"

"I mean," said Wild, interrupting him, "that a certain chief called Jonathan Wild, because he is not personally on the roads that lead north and south and east and west from John O'Groat's to Land's End, and from the Old Bailey to Plymouth on the one hand and Edinburgh on the other, is not to be held as absent; he has his scouts."

"Yes, sir," said Reynolds, "and they no doubt do him good service, though it is a wise government, I've heard say, that gives the subject some liberty of action."

"Oh, oh, a politician, eh?" Wild replied; "with friends in France perhaps?"

"No, Master Wild, neither a politician nor a Jacobite; if you want me it won't be on that lay."

"I shall want you, Master Reynolds, if you rebel, and by the scarred tree of Tyburn I think you have rebelled."

"In what way?"

"Master Quilt, my treasurer, chancellor of the exchequer, and private secretary, has had no report from you for close upon six months, yet you still consider yourself free to levy toll of His Majesty's subjects and on His Majesty's highway."

"Free! Why should I not be free?" retorted Reynolds, hotly.

"Ask the Governor of Newgate."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean."

"Blister me if I do!" said Reynolds. "What has Newgate to do with me?"

"It has a record of a robbery committed by Hesbester Dix!"

"Well?"

"You are Hesbester Dix."

"Indeed, on what evidence?"

"You will find it in the archives of Master Jonathan Wild's house in the Old Bailey. And you ask why you should not be free to patrol His Majesty's highway? Well, there is another reason, and the most important of all—because the Old Bailey house, that protects you in your occupation, has received no tribute, no share of its subject's easily collected spoils. Nay, answer not, until you have reflected. Furthermore, Master Reynolds, the chief who is proud of his soldiers and trusts his officers rejoices to have their reports even though the results be barren."

"The Old Bailey's subject, as you call me, Master Jonathan Wild's slave as you seem to imply, has taken no booty worth dividing these six months."

"You lie, Master Reynolds," said Wild, with that fearlessness that he invariably exhibited towards the most unruly of his subjects, so called. "You took a purse of a hundred guineas from the Bishop of York, none the sweeter that it was meant for the hottentots of the Cannibal Islands, and a month ago valuable property from the Nottingham coach, you and Gentleman Joe, who, by the way, was shot."

"Shot!" exclaimed Reynolds.

"Not by me, Master Reynolds—it is not my way—but by an angry citizen of Bath, who would not 'stand' on the road by Swindon."

"Fatally shot?" asked Reynolds.

"Fatally," replied Wild. "But we are wandering from the subject. I would remind you that a reasonable division of the Bishop and the coach would have satisfied

the Old Bailey treasurer for another six months, and, indeed, with a civil word or two thrown in, respite might have been granted for a year."

"You are mistaken, Master Wild—the booty was of little account, and Gentleman Joe was entitled to most of it; the enterprise was his and the success."

"Mistaken, you say. I am never mistaken."

"I wish I could say as much."

"You would have avoided this road to-night, eh?" said Wild, with a chuckle that startled Reynolds' mare. She did not find Wild's steed to her taste, any more than her master's fellow-traveller was sympathetic towards Reynolds.

"I would, indeed," said Tom.

"Let it be a lesson to you, and a warning. I am like the Bristol man that sleeps with one eye open."

"You're a hard master, sir."

"A just one, Master Reynolds. There follow along the road, at my heels, certain of my janizaries, who are patrolling the great North Road; without my pass, beware of them—beware of them, Tom Reynolds! And look to your neck! Believe me, your head is not so secure as you may think. Derby seems a long way from the Old Bailey to the thoughtless rider; but I assure you, Master Reynolds, the arm of Jonathan Wild has a longer reach."

"Has it! Then, damn you, reach that!" said Reynolds, raising his pistol and firing, with a suddenness that, fortunately for Wild, startled the highwayman's horse as much as it surprised Jonathan's own steed; but the bullet merely went through a corner of Wild's hat.

The action was too unexpected for Wild to do more than fire in return, though not altogether without result. Reynolds, with a sharp cry, put spurs to his horse and fled.

"The fool!" said Wild, repriming his weapon and putting it back into its holster; "the ingrate!"

With that, he patted his horse, which still pranced and showed signs of restlessness. Solacing the animal with such lulling words as "So-ho," "Steady, old Solomon," "No harm done, my pal," "So-ho, take it quietly," he presently pursued his journey and in due course arrived at the "Cross and Mitre," in the valley of the Peak; where he exclaimed against highwaymen and thieves and exhibited the bullet-hole in his hat, and ordered the best supper the house could afford.

A hearty meal disposed of, his horse rubbed down and fed, Jonathan was in time for the usual gathering of the smoking-room habitués, chiefly tradesmen of the village with one or two travellers.

Talk of the comforts of your modern hotel, with its carpeted smoking-room, furnished with writing-desks, adorned with maps and pictures of fashionable watering-places, redolent of cigars, furnished with separate tables at which exclusive groups of men gather together over their sodas-and-brandies, while dress-coated foreign waiters endeavour to learn your language and wait for tips with the air of proprietors of the house; the tavern of our fathers, and more especially its smoking-room, was as much more comfortable and artistic as their furniture and fittings made by hand and polished by smiling domestics are beyond the machine-made chairs and tables of the present day. The latter are alike everywhere, just as our men are monotonously similar in their habits, manners, and attire.

No more picturesque contrast in favour of the past could be made than of the old and the modern tavern. There the topers sat in their tops and smalls, their long brocaded vests, their wigs and high collars, some in their spurs and boots, their great cloth cloaks flung over broad-

seated mahogany chairs, their hot grogs before them, long pipes in their hands or at their lips; mostly weather-beaten, strong, hale, hearty fellows, and in a general way without guile. In this connection, however, Jonathan Wild was the very devil incarnate; but, like his Satanic majesty, who can assume almost angelic shape to suit his own vile purposes, Jonathan could be very agreeable; not an angel of light, most assuredly; his bushy eyebrows, his thin hard lips would deny that, but he was an excellent actor; and the men of the "Cross and Mitre" were delighted with him. He told them strange stories of town, incidents of battle, murder, and sudden death, named the reigning beauties at Court, and insisted upon paying every man's score. When they protested, he urged his plea on the ground of paying his footing, not only by reason of his first visit to Brentfield, but by way of thank-offering for his escape from a desperate highwayman, who might have left his mark upon his head had not Fortune otherwise guided the bullet through his hat.

If the striking personality of Jonathan Wild and his pleasant manners had deeply interested the Brentfield smoking-room, Master Wild had been agreeably entertained; though he was considerably puzzled by a certain traveller, a bushy-haired and bearded fellow, who seemed to know almost as much as he knew himself, and a great deal more about the Old Bailey than Jonathan relished. But it was Jonathan's own fault that he heard so much about himself. He had expressed a fervent hope that Master Wild would lay his hands upon the scoundrel who had taken his purse, and tried to murder him into the bargain.

"Have you ever met Master Wild, sir?" asked the traveller, in a deep husky voice.

"I have had that honour," said Jonathan. "It was over a little matter of plate that I had lost."

"Stolen property?" asked the traveller.

"Just so," said Jonathan. "My house in Golden Square was 'cracked,' as the scoundrels call housebreaking."

"Did Master Wild find the property for you?"

"He did, sir."

"Perhaps he did the 'cracking,'" said the traveller, with a wink, at which the smoking-room laughed.

"What do you mean, my friend?"

"They say Jonathan Wild is as great a villain as the City Marshal."

"Do they really?" said Jonathan.

"But a great deal wiser."

"Oh, he is wise, this Jonathan Wild?"

"Wise, as they say serpents are—and as slippery," replied the traveller.

"And the City Marshal?"

"Oh," said the traveller, laughing in a chuckling, gurgling way, "he's a fool. Jonathan has him in a string, as they lead bears."

"Is that so?"

"His name's Hitchen, you must know, gentlemen. But it is hardly fair to attack a man behind his back, or I could tell you a story or two about Jonathan Wild and Hitchen that would surprise you."

"Don't trouble about his absence, sir," said Wild; "you can no doubt make an appointment to meet him and tell him all this to his face; he sees all who call upon him."

"Does he so?" replied the traveller.

"So they informed me when I waited upon him at his house and place of business in the Old Bailey, and I found no difficulty at all; a most honest and courtly gentleman, I assure you."

"Is that so of a truth?" remarked the traveller. "Yet

it is commonly believed in London that he consorts with rogues and rufflers and the like, even with highwaymen; I've heard it said that he and the notorious Bill Horton are boon companions when Bill makes holiday in London. A devil, I can tell you, Bill Horton! He once stopped me at Finchley; I had a shot at him, and it cost me every shilling I had about me, my watch, my coat and hat, and my very boots, and the brute left me horseless on the road with a November gale coming on."

"A devil of a fellow indeed!" the smoking-room seemed to think; but they agreed with the traveller that it is a mistake to shoot unless you are sure of your mark.

"Perhaps," said Jonathan, "Master Wild as a thief-taker may consort with rufflers and rogues, as our friend alleges, for the purposes of his duty to the State; for, mark you, there is no better way, if you are to be successful in any trade, than to know all about it; and I make no doubt Master Wild gets into the confidence of the London cracksmen to their disadvantage."

"A thief to catch a thief," said the traveller, with a laugh that irritated Jonathan; but he kept his countenance well, and laughed with the traveller.

The smoking-room seemed to think it was a clever plant of Master Wild to become acquainted with villainy that he could the better arrest it.

"That may be so, of course," said the traveller, "though, for my own part, I believe that Master Wild is himself a villain. I cast no slight upon his talents, his courage, nor his wisdom; but, as I said before, it is hardly honest to be hard upon a man when he is not present to defend himself."

"That's as one may feel. If a man is a villain, it matters not whether he is present to have his nose metaphorically tweaked or to cut the wizend of his traducer.

A villain's a villain. Honest men treat him as such—and be damned to him !" said Jonathan indignantly ; and the smoking-room tossed off its liquor in perfect agreement. "At the same time," continued Jonathan, "you amaze me, sir, when you assert that Master Jonathan Wild, of the Old Bailey, the trusted servant of the State, thief-taker, and ally of the City Marshal of London town, is a villain. Pray, now, how do you convict him of villainy?"

"He is rich," said the traveller.

"Is that a crime?" asked Jonathan ; and the smoking-room nodded its head, as much as to say, "The stranger hath you there."

"When it is ill-gotten," replied the traveller.

"Ah, ah," assented the smoking-room, that veered about with every shifting line of argument.

"Are riches ill-gotten that are the reward of great services to the State and in the interests of justice?" asked Jonathan.

"If they be abnormal," said the traveller.

"That was a palpable hit," the smoking-room thought ; it was such a cumbersome and convincing word.

"What do you mean by abnormal?

"Aye, that's a fair question," intimated the smoking-room, in nods and "hums" and "hahs" and by refilling its pipes.

"Unusual, unaccountable, what you will ; gains that require justification," said the traveller. "It is not always easy to answer questions of the meaning of words on the spur of the moment."

"They tell me, at Court," said Jonathan, "that Master Wild has hanged more cracksmen, highwaymen, forgers, and rufflers in a year than justice, unassisted by his wisdom and patriotic endeavour, would have sent to Tyburn in seven."

"If that was the opinion of the Court there is no more to be said," intimated the smoking-room; and the traveller was fain to admit that the stranger evidently knew more about the notorious or famous thief-taker than he might presume to know, which was a very graceful admission, the smoking-room thought; and the stranger with the bullet-hole in his hat insisted upon the landlord fetching from the cellar half a dozen bottles of his choicest canary—an order that had rarely been rivalled as an addition to the score of a guest. "In honour of the smoking-room, and in gratitude for my escape from villainy on the highway," said Jonathan; "and I hope Master Jonathan Wild's men may lay hands on the rogue. I wish justice no better subject, for he was a scurvy villain to try and shoot me after I had assured him of my poverty, and had, nevertheless, disbursed a fairly-filled purse," which lying confession caused the landlord to look a trifle dubious as to the reckoning; whereupon Jonathan, with a laugh, said, "Gentlemen, let me give you a hint, from the experience of an old traveller—carry two purses; one for the knight of the road, as the villain calls himself in his vainglorious way, and the other for yourself." He drew forth a long leathern bag, and there was no mistake about its being well lined. "Sooner than part with that, gentlemen," he said, "I should fight for it; as for the other that has gone, why, fifty guineas is no very serious toll to pay between here and Charing Cross."

He was voted a right cheery, high-minded, free-and-easy gentleman; and the next day, when he sallied forth into the little town to see its lions, he had already learnt that Lady Waller, of Brent Hall, had gone to London, and, to their amazement, to see Sir Patrick Brent, her brother. Sir Patrick, they informed Mr. Wild, very rarely came to The Rookery, while Lady Waller seldom

left Brent Hall. He found it quite easy to obtain admission to both these houses, as a stranger travelling for pleasure and instruction through the Peak; and he started on his return journey to town possessed with a knowledge of all that Brentfield knew about the Brents, their belongings, and associations, not forgetting the history even of his sometime employé, Peter Ferrish. The traveller, who had entered into a controversy with him at the "Cross and Mitre," had begged to be allowed to ride with him towards London. "Two honest men on the road are safer than one in these unhappy days of Jacobite plots and excursions of highwaymen," he said. And so they set out, Jonathan leaving behind him the reputation of nobility as well as generosity. He had recorded his name in the tavern ledger as Lord Claremont. The controversial traveller was understood to be a well-known merchant of Cheapside.

They set out rather later in the day than the "Cross and Mitre" thought wise; though both their pleasant guests declared that they would be a match for any opposition they might meet with. Moreover, the traveller said they would reach the "Jolly Miller," on the Derby road, by moonlight, and for his part he should propose to put up there for the night. It was early spring. The trees were just giving promise of bud and leaf, and the meadows were white and yellow with daisies and buttercups. The two men were well mounted, and they rode along for some miles in competition of horsemanship, occasionally drawing rein at roadside hostelries; once meeting a coach bound for Manchester; passing waggons going south, farmers and their wives returning from market, sturdy beggars on their way to local fairs. When the sun went down the highway became quieter, and here and there the road was darkened with stretches of forest and woodland. The traveller remarked that one

of the woods they passed had been a favourite haunt of that famous outlaw, Robin Hood.

Jonathan had expressed considerable admiration for the romantic hero of Sherwood; but the traveller took exception to him, decried knavery in strong terms, and would have nothing said in favour of Robin Hood, even on the grounds Jonathan put forward, that the Sherwood hero had been driven to make war upon the rich by tyrannous treatment. Furthermore, he urged that he only took toll of those who could well afford to be robbed. The traveller said that such arguments might be used in favour of highway robbery in their own day; but Jonathan, careful not to betray himself, argued that the conditions were different, and he confessed for his part that he entirely sympathised with the operations of Jonathan Wild in his efforts to bring the villainous knaves of the road to Tyburn. And so they rode along, each disguising his own character. Now and then they paused to refresh themselves and pay their way through toll-gates, until by and by the last rays of the sun melted away.

Jonathan, with all his cleverness, was a vain man. The traveller had considerably hurt his pride in the controversy at the "Cross and Mitre." If he had not proposed to ride in his company, Jonathan had determined to offer him a similar invitation. He burned to be revenged upon him, and, while he tried to keep up a pleasant conversation, he was meditating how he could get the better of him, and in a complete, characteristic, and comprehensive fashion.

"A dark night," he said, as the brief twilight merged into clouds and shadow.

"And likely to be stormy," the traveller replied.

"There's a moon," said Jonathan.

"An inconstant one, as the poets have it," said the traveller.

"Inconstant?" repeated Jonathan, inquiringly.

"Fitful," the traveller replied, "like woman's friendship."

"Sentiment and trade seem to keep company in your case," replied Jonathan.

"You know that I am a merchant, then?"

"They told me so," said Jonathan. "I, too, do a little in that way."

"Indeed," said the other. "In what direction?"

"I am a shipper; deal mostly with Holland."

"Yes," said the other. "Seen adventures, no doubt?"

"Many," said Jonathan.

"When we draw rein at the 'Jolly Miller,' we will exchange experiences. I have myself travelled. In the meantime we must push on. The moon is coming out for awhile, and the road is better a few miles ahead."

The traveller touched his horse gently with the spur. It leaped at the suggestion, and made the running hard for Jonathan, though he also was well mounted. There was silence for quite a distance. Jonathan dropping behind, took his pistols from their holsters.

They had ridden a couple of hours, and had reached a long stretch of forest. Once in a way the moonbeams flickered through the branches of the trees. The traveller pulled his horse into a walk.

"A kind man is kind to his beast," he said.

"And a fool should be dealt with according to his folly," answered Wild, suddenly reining up and facing the traveller with a pair of snappers. "I'll trouble you, sir; your money or your life!"

"Oh, oh, oh," laughed the traveller. "Jonathan! Jonathan! Turn toll-collector yourself? By the honour of the profession, I've a mind to take your other purse!"

"Hell and thunder! If you don't instantly disburse I'll shoot you," said Jonathan, hot with rage and chagrin.

"Then shoot, you old bungler, and be hanged to you!" was the prompt reply. And without more ado, Jonathan fired off both his pistols; but by a dexterous movement of the more expert horseman, he found himself on his back in the road, his steed breaking away, to return, however, at the call of its owner.

"Not hurt," said the traveller, dismounting, and speaking in an entirely different tone of voice from that in which he had criticised the thief-taker. "The moon is friendly; she will make us better acquainted." And the Queen of Night showed Wild, as he scrambled to his feet, another member of his guerilla company, Bill Horton, who, removing his wig and beard, stood revealed, the handsome "gallant of the road," known by admiring friends of both sexes as "the pride of Hounslow Heath."

"Curse you!" said Jonathan, gathering himself together. "I am hurt, and in a way that you shall remember."

"Then this shall be our last transaction," Horton replied. "Give me your purse, or I'll brain you!"

Mr. Wild struck an attitude of defence. Horton had him by the throat in an instant. Wild resisted, and succeeded in flinging Horton off; but the highwayman covered him with his pistols. "Both loaded," he remarked; and Jonathan was fain to disgorge.

"The purse you keep for yourself, the purse you'll fight for—come, Master Wild. What! It has disappeared? Is this it?"

And Horton dangled it before him, as a conjurer might who had previously started a flight of pigeons from his hat.

"My dear Jonathan, let the cobbler stick to his last," said Horton; "you are no hand at my business, a great master, a king at your own, in which I should be but a baby. I heard of your starting for the north, followed you from curiosity, and with no thought of business. Last night I met poor Tom Reynolds, with his arm in a sling and his temper in a fever."

"Curse him!" said Wild.

"That is exactly what he said of you; and I think you were rather severe on him, eh? You think not. Well, as you please. He told me what had occurred, and I vowed to teach you a lesson."

"Which I will requite," said Jonathan.

"I think not. Reynolds took you for a sheep, and discovered the wolf. I took you for no sheep, and I am no sheep myself. Tom Reynolds fitted me with a wig and beard; I provided myself with a commercial voice. In his time, a highwayman learns to play many parts. While I was asking to be permitted to ride with you, I took your purse; I had already unloaded your pistols. I intended, by the way, to hold you up, and enjoy the chagrin of the brave man who threatens with empty weapons, and when asked for his purse finds he has none. You anticipated me, but without spoiling the joke. Rot it, but you're not angry, eh, my patron saint of virtue?"

"Angry, my right merry jester?" Jonathan replied. "You are a genius. I am but a poor humble creature, Master Horton. Let us pull up at the next roadside tavern and swear eternal friendship. Never had vanity so great a fall; never one so well deserved. You had irritated me woefully at the 'Cross and Mitre,' I admit it. You are the only man in the world who can bear witness to my folly, and can boast of my humiliation. But, by all the powers of heaven and hell, I swear to you, William Horton, that if I should ever hear a whisper of the

encounter between us twain of last night and to-day, I will hang you—by my soul I will, if you were my dearest and most valued friend and ally—hang you without remorse."

"Take my hand, Master Wild," said Horton; "does it tremble?"

"Never a vibration," said Wild.

"Jonathan Wild, I fear you not; but from this moment I forget the little jest we have played each other."

They supped at the "Jolly Miller," and never once did either of them refer to the adventure on the road or to the controversy at the "Cross and Mitre."

"I shall go to bed," said Jonathan, after a hot jorum of toddy, "and ride early in the morning."

"To London?"

"To London," said Jonathan. "Waiter!"

"Yes, sir."

"Slippers."

"Here they are, sir."

"Good-night, Horton."

"Good-night," said Horton.

"Shall we meet in the morning?"

"I have business on the way to York before the night is over," Horton replied.

"Good fortune attend you!" said Jonathan.

"The same to you," Horton replied; and, with formal bows to each other, they separated.

"He is devilishly put out," said Horton to himself. "But I've taught him a lesson, the vain old beast; and by Jupiter, if he tries on any game with me, I'll give him a pill that will settle him."

Then, buttoning his coat and calling for the ostler, he strapped his cloak about him, went to the stable, patted his horse, that had been groomed and refreshed, and set off, not for York, but on the road to London.

CHAPTER V

ROGUES IN COUNCIL, AND ONE A PETTICOAT

"It is a rare thing for Jonathan Wild to trust London all by herself for a whole week at a time, Mr. Quilt," remarked Joseph Blake, better known to the fraternity of Hockley-in-the-Hole as Blueskin, chiefly on account of the somewhat cerulean hue of his complexion, though they might have called him Redskin with equal justification; for he had a nose that cast a rubicund light upon his countenance, and he rather boasted of its radiance. It was the kind of nose that Bardolph wore as a mark for the rugged wit of Falstaff.

Blueskin, in every respect a marked contrast to Quilt, was of herculean build, broad of shoulder, loud-voiced, daring, defiant, and of a genial, rollicking nature; true to his pals, and, under his seeming reckless carriage, a man of shrewd observation, whose work, while it was characterised by audacity, had plenty of method in it. He had tried his hand on the road, but his forte was housebreaking; and without arrogance he might have described himself as the king of cracksmen.

On the other hand, Quilt was pale, light of limb, watchful, suggesting cunning rather than physical strength. There was something of the student in his appearance. He was not only deferential to his chief, but respectful to every member of Mr. Wild's band, whatever their position or prospects. Blake was inclined to resent Quilt's servility as much as he doubted his sincerity. There are exceptions to the rule that there is honour among thieves; and Blueskin sometimes paused over his cups to wonder why Quilt was such a tame dog under all circumstances

in the difficult service of Jonathan Wild. Quilt might have told him; but Quilt kept his own counsel, and bided his time.

"Mr. Wild is, I believe, away on the business of the nation, Mr. Blake," said Quilt, in his gentlest tone of voice.

"Oh—ah—yes, precisely," said Blueskin; "making hay in the Jacobin sunshine? or planning strategic approaches, as he calls 'em, for the siege of a new crib to be cracked by an old hand? Well, I'll bet a wager he nicks 'em."

Then, turning his bright black eyes towards the mantelpiece, he said, "Got a new picture, Master Quilt, eh?"

"Yes, Master Blake, the portrait of Judge Jeffreys; a work of art Mr. Wild has recently purchased."

"Purchased? Could nobody have 'achieved' it, as Master Wild himself would say, or 'made booty' of it, that he must purchase it? But how purchased, say you?"

"With gold, sir, and it gave him pleasure to pay down the forfeiture. Judge Jeffreys was a man after Mr. Wild's own heart, firm, relentless, and——"

"A villain! Ah, ah, my covey, you are not often so free of speech; but while the lion's out marauding, the jackal can have his little joke, eh? Nay, don't be afeard —Blueskin never peaches;" and the rollicking bandit laughed a loud guffaw at Quilt's discomfiture.

"You mistake me, Master Blake," said Quilt, nervously.

"Nay, my covey, I don't; and you may be a match for him yet, for, rot me, if I don't think there's some devilish deep design under your natty weskit."

Quilt was standing at a tall desk during this conversation, professedly at work on an account book, with a quill pen, which he occasionally stuck behind his ear.

He made little other use of it, Blake occupying all his attention. The room was Mr. Wild's private office, at the back of a more public kind of counting-house, where criminal records were kept and a ledger account of property lost and found, in connection with a gullible public that sought Mr. Wild's assistance in the restoration of stolen property, and the no less interesting records of the operations of Mr. Wild's army of thieves, a band of guerillas that was as varied as it was daring and successful. His house in the Old Bailey was a bureau of knavery such as the world has rarely seen: an office for the receipt of stolen property, as well as for the restoration of it; an agency for the employment of men-servants in distinguished families; a secret-service department in the interest of the Government for the tracking of Jacobites; as well as a museum of criminal relics, weapons with which murders had been committed, and even the skulls of felons who had been executed. These things were chiefly displayed in Mr. Wild's private office, where, in his absence, Mr. Quilt was permitted to receive his most familiar and trusted employés.

Among the latter was Elizabeth Lyon, who rejoiced in the patronymic of Edgeworth Bess, in honour of the town of Edgeworth, in Middlesex, where she was born.

"Hello, Bess! Why, quod me, but, my 'nuttiest blowen,'* Venus is a Hottentot to you! What's in the wind?"

---

* In the thieves' slang of the time "nuttiest blowen" meant favourite mistress, just as "speak" with a thing meant to steal it, and a "boozing ken" stood for alehouse, "quod kull" a turnkey, "file" a pickpocket, a "fence" or a "lock" a receiver of stolen goods, "darbies" fetters, a "rattler" a coach, "stoning" Newgate, "box" a cell, "dubsman" turnkey, "the tattler is up" the moon shines, and so on; not forgetting (on the authority of Harrison Ainsworth) that "Nix my doll! pals,

"The bloom of the mornin' to you, old pal," said the fair and buxom Bess. "I came to see Jonathan. He said he'd business for me. How are you, Master Faint-heart?" and thereupon she put out her plump hand to Quilt, who leaned over it in gallant fashion and pressed his dry lips to three fingers.

"There's for you, Blue! That's the way to receive a favourite mistress, as you calls me; though I'm sometimes half afraid Master Quilt will bite me when he touches my hand with his lips, that smiles so sugary and may one day snap and snarl and the devil knows what!"

"The very thing I was a-sayin' to him, but without your poetic flourish, my dear," said Blueskin.

"My dear Mistress Lyon, why will you be so unkind? You make others mistrust me. Master Blake has been calling me jackal," said Quilt, leaving his desk and placing a chair for Bess. "Pray be seated. I had thought Mr. Wild was a hundred miles away, but if you say he expected to meet you at this hour, he will be here any moment."

"Where's he gone, Quilt?" asked the lady, leaning back in her seat and tapping her boots with a smart

---

fake away," meant "Nothing, comrades; on, on"—supposed to be addressed by a thief to his comrades. It would have been easy to scatter these pages with this kind of "cant phraseology," but it has been avoided to spare the reader the irritation of having to refer constantly to a glossary of terms; at the same time it does not appear, according to the records of the criminal trials of the period and other evidence of note, that either Jack Sheppard, Joseph Blake, Mr. Jonathan Wild, or Edgeworth Bess were in the habit of garnishing their talk with thieves' slang except on very rare occasions, in the presence, for example, of possible spies or by way of a passing exhibition of their knowledge of the signs and passwords of the army of professional prigs, rogues, rufflers, and outlaws of which they were conspicuous and shining lights.

whip, for she was in riding costume; a gay figure, in silken skirt and masculine jerkin.

"To the north," he said.

"Highgate?"

"Oh no, Mistress Lyon, further afield, Yorkshire way."

"As far as that?"

"So he said."

"And made no secret of it?"

"None—among friends," said Quilt, with a bow that took in Blueskin and Bess.

"Well, I'm not for waiting; my time is valuable," said Bess. "I am promised to Bill Horton for a ride across Hounslow at noon."

"Bill Horton!" said Blueskin, with a chuckle. "Where's your pistols, Bess?"

"It's a non-professional ride, Blue, old feller. I don't sport snappers in the daylight, and I'm not active in the business."

"You shoots 'em with your peepers and enslaves 'em with your 'strummel faked in the newest twig,' as the song says. Well, good luck to you, Bess. If you must go, give my greetings to Bill; hope he'll look in at the Minters' to-night."

"S—s—sh," whispered Quilt, turning to his desk, "he's coming."

And the next moment Wild walked in, pulled off a pair of thick riding-gloves, and nodding to his visitors.

"Glad to see you," he said, with a curl of his lip intended for a smile, that was more like the snarl of a wolf.

"Thankee," said Blueskin. "Glad you said so."

"What do you mean?" asked Wild, handing his three-cornered hat to Quilt, who assisted him to remove his hooded cloak, leaving the thief-taker in a square-cut

undercoat and breeches of rich brown cloth, with a sword-belt, which was presently unbuckled and removed by the attentive Quilt, who was Wild's valet, private secretary, and confidant.

"You said you were glad, and snapped at us as if you'd bite our heads off, damme!" said Blueskin, who, if he stomached an affront at any time, would lose his life before he would have his manhood lowered in the estimation of a woman.

"Ah, ah!" laughed Bess, in a merry peal, "ah, ah, bravo, Blue! A hit, as they say in the fencing-school; a hit!"

Wild, glowering under his dark eyebrows and facing the two with compressed lips, was about to utter a scathing retort; but, thinking better of it, sat down at his desk, like a merchant or banker at the receipt of custom.

Quilt placed several packages before him, and a letter-bag.

"If I didn't love you both, I'd have hanged you long ago," said Wild, with a snap of his hard mouth and a flash of his cruel eyes.

"Here, Master Wild, stow it!" said Blueskin, taking a step towards the master and looking down upon him. "What the blazes has gone wrong? Curse me, whatever it is, you are not to put it to our account, and you are not to insult a lady in the presence of Blueskin, rough and ready a cove though he be; and that I tell you."

Wild looked up at Blueskin from beneath his bushy eyebrows and smiled, a curious, scoffing smile, upon which Blueskin turned aside with a growl.

"You are used to be so civil, Master Wild," said Edgeworth Bess, "and as for hanging, you'd best not threaten me, mark you that, I won't bear it;" and she switched her skirts with her whip and marched about the room.

"Oh, oh, here's a couple of rebels," said Wild. "Listen to them, Quilt. No: on second thoughts, Quilt, I will ask you to leave me with my revolting subjects."

"Yes, Master Wild," said Quilt, disappearing, without a sound of his footsteps and taking his place for a moment behind a screen, that always masked the doorway to Mr. Wild's more private sanctum.

Blueskin watched for the door to open and shut; you could see the top of it above the screen. There were times when Quilt opened and shut the door with a bang, and still remained behind the screen. On this occasion he made an honest exit, but waited within call, or rather within sound, of Wild's signal, which was frequently a tap on the wainscot.

"And now that Master Quilt has really left the room, what's the game?" asked Blueskin, still out of humour. "Was it for his ears that you made ours tingle, or why are we threatened?"

"Yes, why?" asked Bess.

"Why! Would you oppose me?" asked Wild, rubbing his hands and rising from his seat. "I see you would. Well, you would find it a hard fight. We should be worthy of each other. Blueskin wouldn't shoot and run away, would you, Master Blake?"

"No, damme if I would!"

"Either way you would get the worst of it. Tom Reynolds shot and ran away. Look at this—Thomas Reynolds, his mark."

He took down his hat, and showed them how narrowly he had escaped the Reynolds bullet.

"Tom Reynolds!" exclaimed Blueskin. "Is that Tom's mark?"

"It is," said Wild, replacing the hat, "and before he is thirty days older he'll have my mark upon his throat;

the impress of a kind of necklace, my dear Edgeworth Bess, that I hope you will ever be spared from wearing."

He turned such a dark look upon the fresh round face of Bess that her cheeks paled and she trembled.

"What was the trouble, Master Wild? Tom Reynolds is not much of a fire-eater. I'd have laid a wager against his facing you, sir, on any terms."

"Ah, well, let it pass, Blueskin. We met on the road; I was inspecting the country, visiting our outposts; as one may say, looking after our sentinels. Reynolds turned traitor. He was always a fool." Then, with a smile, as if he dismissed a trivial subject, he said, turning to the lady, "You are in great feather, Bess."

He inspected her with an approach to geniality, and even chucked her under the chin; but still she shivered at him.

"'Fortune favours the brave' is a saying of Master Blake," she replied, with all the calmness she could assume.

"Why all this ceremony and making of fine words, Master Wild? What's the game?" said Blueskin.

"You shall hear, Master Blake, you shall hear," Wild replied, once more at his desk and motioning Bess and Blueskin to be seated.

Bess dropped into a chair by the mantel, and, arranging the skirt of her riding-habit, looked steadily at Blueskin, who, taking the back of a chair and lowering it that he could step over it, sat cross-legged upon the seat and contemplated his chief.

"There is in Wych Street a carpenter's shop," said Wild. "It adjoins Master Owen Wood's house. He is the carpenter, a man of some means, and who is reported to have had a heavy holding of South Sea Stock. But

that is by the way. He has among his half-dozen apprentices two lads you are to know ; one Jack Sheppard, the other Eric Beryl. The first born for adventure ; the second a prig, a pretender, an upstart. Wood has a daughter. Ah, now I interest you, Bess. You smile. They say she is a beauty. She is known as the Belle of Wych Street !"

"A poor ambition compared with a belle of Ranelagh and Hounslow, the belle of the Mint and the queen of Hockley," said Blueskin, kissing his great brown hand at Bess.

"Your servant, sir," said Bess, rising with mirthful politeness and bowing ceremoniously. "I am beholden to you."

"A pretty girl, the sort of wench that some women envy. I want certain information concerning Eric Beryl, which I will explain later. Sheppard is clever, both as carpenter and locksmith. You, my dear Master Blake, will introduce Sheppard first to your own craft, and then to Edgeworth Bess."

"'Thank you kindly, sir, she said—sir, she said—sir, she said, Thank you kindly, sir, she said,'" replied Bess, in a not unmusical voice, and rising to curtsey to Master Wild. She had got over her fright, and Wild had ceased frowning. "I'm getting on—decoy to a carpenter's apprentice. Oh, Master Jonathan Wild, you are too kind !"

"He's a free man, my girl ; neither beaks nor nucks have a claim upon him. No man as yet can shake a halter at him, nor even your humble servant, Jonathan Wild ; he's destined for laced shirt and silken hose, and one day may flaunt it with the proudest of cracksmen in the Tyburn chariot—who knows? So be kind to him !"

"You're a cruel beast !" exclaimed Bess, recklessly ;

stirred by the irony of Wild's indication of the game she and Blueskin were expected to play, and encouraged by the bold and defiant aspect of Blueskin, who had risen to his feet.

"Cruel only to be kind," Wild quickly replied before Blueskin could say anything that might make a further breach in the relationship of the trio; for Wild had not conducted the business with his usual diplomatic *sang-froid*. The truth is, he had not yet recovered from his defeats at the hands of Reynolds and Horton. "But beware that the beast never have occasion to do more than show his teeth, Mistress Elizabeth Lyon."

"You know that I don't like to have you call me Mistress Lyon," said Bess; "it means you are out of humour with me."

"You broke your tryst with Anthony Upton," said Wild, sharply.

"I don't care for Anthony Upton."

"The more reason why you should have obeyed my orders."

"Never disobey the command of your chief, Bess," said Blueskin, "once you have said 'yes' to it."

"I hate Anthony Upton," she said.

"Your hatred will be appeased," said Wild, once more flourishing his snuff-box.

"How?" she asked, with an anxiety that was prompted by a certain little chuckle that Wild rarely indulged in without serious meaning.

"To-morrow he will be condemned."

"Poor wretch!" she exclaimed. "I did not hate him to that extent."

"He owes his death to you. If you had kept your engagement at Hockley he would have escaped."

"How should I have known?"

"You should have obeyed."

"God forgive me! You can say the word that would set him free."

"The law is a tyrant, my dear girl," said Wild, assuming his most gracious manner—and he was not (as we have already seen) a bad actor—"but I will think it over."

"You will?" she exclaimed, with the sunshine of hope in her eyes. "You will; good for you; then I'll make friends with your apprentice. Is he in love with Mistress Wood?"

"I have reason to believe so," said Wild, as he touched the wainscot and brought Quilt immediately upon the scene.

"Yes, Master Wild."

"Show Mistress Edgeworth Bess to her coach, or to her attendant groom, or whatever her state may be."

Blueskin, however, brushed Quilt aside with a "Beg pardon," and, opening the door, bowed Edgeworth Bess out with a rough courtesy, saying to her as she took her leave, "Keep your heart up, Bess; I'll stand by you."

When she had passed into the street Blueskin returned, to find Mr. Wild once more alone.

"Master Wild," he said, "I thank you."

"For what?" snapped Wild.

"Being polite to Edgeworth Bess at parting. Rot me, but I'm doomed if I can look on insulted beauty without my hands itching to get at somebody's throat!"

"You ought to have been a dancing master, Blake, you're such a ladies' man," said Wild. "But hark'ee, Blue, my friend, there's a great game to be played in Wych Street. We'll eat a morsel of dinner on it, and smoke the pipe of reflection, eh, what d'ye say?"

"I never refuse a dinner in the Old Bailey; 'cause

why, Master Wild? I knows how the great chief dines, and I approve of his tap."

"Very well," said Wild, again signalling Quilt.

"Yes, Master Wild," said Quilt, inquiringly, for Wild had turned to his desk and was opening letters.

"Send Mistress Wild to me."

Quilt withdrew; and there presently appeared a tall and somewhat stately person of middle age, with a severe expression of countenance, not ill-looking, neatly dressed, and with her brown hair tucked up into an artistic knob.

"Did my messenger arrive an hour ago?"

"He did, Jonathan," said the woman, promptly and without fear.

"Then dinner is ready?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Joseph Blake will join us."

"'Tis well," she answered. "You are welcome, Master Blake."

She curtseyed and withdrew.

"Well, Blue, old friend, how's that for a wife?"

"Good," said Blueskin. "I did not know that you had married again."

"I cannot put up with widowerhood," Wild replied. "I was a miserable wretch when the late Mistress Wild departed—lost my appetite for a week. You are a profligate, Blake; I am a virtuous and domesticated citizen."

"It agrees with you," said Blake, "and you change your mate almost as often as Bluebeard."

"Sir!" said Wild, turning upon him. "My present wife is my fourth; it has pleased Heaven to take three of them."

"Your enemies would say it has also pleased them to be taken. There, damme, don't frown; I know better. Upon my soul, I believe you are what they call a good husband; otherwise you——"

"Are a devil, eh? If I am Satanic on occasion, it is in self-defence, Blake, only in self-defence."

"You play the part as if you like it," retorted Blake; but at that moment Mrs. Wild reappeared.

"Dinner is served," she said.

"What did you say, Blake?"

"For what we are about to receive, give us grateful hearts and a devil of an appetite."

"Lead on, Mistress Wild," said the thief-taker; "you will find in Mr. Blake an appreciative guest."

CHAPTER VI

JACK SHEPPARD AT WYCH STREET

On a summer morning, a few weeks after Jonathan Wild's "pipe of peace and reflection" with Master Joseph Blake, alias Blueskin, Mr. Owen Wood's apprentices were hurrying over their work as if a rapid plane or a rasping saw might quicken the minutes that intervened between them and a cherished holiday. They had, with the permission of their master, promised themselves an exciting time. It was not a wayze-goose, a cricket match, a trip to Margate, nor anything so tame as a day off in the present era of civilized sports and pastimes. They were going to see a man hanged. Tyburn tree blossomed and bore its ghastly fruit all the year round; and the highwayman going to his death in fine clothes, with a song and a swagger of defiance, was counted a brave and gallant sight.

A carpenter's shop is always more or less picturesque and pleasant. It has a clean and fresh smell of shavings and sawdust. There is music in its operations and an

air of cheerfulness among its workmen. The absence of machinery gives it an aspect of leisure and a suggestion of antiquity such as strikes you in a weaver's shop or a pottery where the wheel of the Pharaohs is still the mechanical genius of the craft. But there is no carpentry to-day so quaint and attractive as that of Owen Wood of Wych Street in this history. It had a broad, diamond-paned window. On the sill there was a row of raddled flower-pots. The sun shone with a will in those days upon the adjacent Strand and river. No sky-soaring buildings, flats, new hotels and theatres blocked out the light of heaven from the London streets. The roadways were not as well kept and the dust-cart paid few visits to the byways and alleys. At night every thoroughfare was haunted by footpads. There were no omnibuses. Few and mangy were the hackney coaches. The dirty sidewalk was separated from the dirtier roadway by posts, over which the lads of the time played leapfrog, while cumbrous waggons and bedizened carriages churned into mud the various refuse flung into the street by thoughtless housewives and idle apprentices. But Wych Street, Drury Lane, the Strand, Fleet Street, and other commercial thoroughfares in Owen Wood's locality were gabled and had every kind of picturesque window and loophole, and signs that swung in the breeze, from ornamental brackets exhibiting Saracens' Heads, Golden Keys, Red Lions, Blue Boars, Bibles, and Crowns and Mitres, and many other emblems of trade that shone in the summer sun or groaned in the storms of winter. One might easily be tempted to catalogue the strange and remarkable contrasts of then and now in the life and aspect of the English capital.

Collect in your fancy all the old Dutch, Flemish, and German houses you have seen in your travels, with bits of old Bristol, Chester, and the timbered houses of the

Midland towns. Plant them around Wych Street, Newcastle Street, Holywell Street (now Booksellers' Row), Fleet Street, and the Strand, with a row of traitors' heads on Temple Bar. Add to this architectural and imperial panorama a miscellaneous pedestrian crowd of picturesque tatterdemalions, broken life-guardsmen, lawyers from the Temple, merchants, students, and "the beauteous slatterns, the Phrynes and Aspasias of the Fleet Street Athens, with their paint and patches and their black visor masks, their organ-pipe head-dresses, their low stomachers, and their high-heeled shoes; beggars, cut-purses, swindlers, tavern bilks, foreign counts, native highwaymen, and some poor unfortunates, the victims of a Draconic law of debtor and creditor." * Furthermore, imagine the narrow roadway contested for precedence by chariot-like coaches, tall covered waggons, and other cumbersome vehicles, mostly without springs, always with broad wheels and heavily horsed; on the unpaved sidewalk, within the posts of the gutter, sedan chairs lurching along among the foot-passengers; at shop-doors (entrances to houses from the top windows of which the inhabitants could shake hands with each other across the street) apprentices calling attention to their masters' wares: all in such quaint costumes as you have only seen in some stage-play illustrative of the period or in pictures of the time; at night dimly lighted by oil lamps, flambeaux, and tallow candles, but in the day by the true sun that we now disguise with myriads of coal fires and the smoke of engine-houses! Then you will have evolved from books and picture galleries and experiences of travel something of the character and atmosphere of the London of our story. And so we leave you to it, while we return to the carpenter's

* Sala's "William Hogarth," 1866.

shop of Owen Wood, where his apprentices and his sanctimoniously professed foreman are discussing what to some of them will be a first experience of one of the most demoralising exhibitions of a peculiarly immoral and turbulent age.

"You've seen Tyburn* on a busy day before now, I warrant you, Master Longden," said the youngest apprentice, Tom Briggs, a veritable picture in his brown kersey breeches, drugget waistcoat, and ample shirt-sleeves tucked up to his elbows.

---

* The value of a foot-note is many-sided. It is invariably instructive, it may be read at any time or not at all. If the text to which it is an addendum be fascinating, it is accepted gratefully as an additional sop in the pan. If otherwise, well then otherwise to what extent the reader shall please. In the present work it is introduced to relieve the general narrative from descriptive and statistical matter that might be deemed tedious in the text. Tyburn as a place of execution was established in the reign of Henry IV. It took its name from a brook called Tyburn, which had its rise at Hampstead. Oxford Street used to be known as Tyburn Road, and the present aristocratic quarter known as Park Lane was called Tyburn Lane. "The gallows was of a triangular form, resting on three supports," says the "Book of Days," "and hence is often spoken of as 'Tyburn's Triple Tree.' It was a permanent erection, and there also stood near it wooden galleries for the accommodation of parties who came to witness the infliction of the last penalty" of the law. Among remarkable individuals who suffered death at Tyburn were the Holy Maid of Kent in Henry VIII.'s reign; Mrs. Turner, notorious as a prisoner and celebrated as the inventress of yellow starch; John Felton, the assassin of the Duke of Buckingham; and the elegant and courtly Dr. Dodd, whom pecuniary embarrassments—the result of a life of extravagance and immorality—hurried into crime. "The conveyance of the criminals from Newgate to Tyburn by Holborn Hill and the Oxford Road, afforded, by the distance traversed, an ample opportunity to all lovers of such sights for obtaining a view of the ghastly procession."

"I have," said Master Longden, looking up from his bench and wiping the perspiration from his face with his apron. "And Tyburn tree is a warning I hope you'll profit by."

"Do you allow that it's saved you from temptation?" asked Bill Winch, pausing, hammer in hand, and bringing the other apprentices into listening attitudes.

"Come next May-day," said Longden, "I shall be five-and-thirty; young enough to be tempted, old enough to know that honesty means contentment, and contentment spells happiness. But when I was your age, I confess, I had a fancy for taking to the road."

"And what hindered you?" asked Dick Smith, stirring a melting mass of glue over a fire blinking in the sun that poured through the diamond panes and flickered on the shining metal of many and varied tools on benches and shelves.

"What hindered me?" repeated Longden. "The hanging of Captain Kidd at Execution Dock; that hindered me; he died so hard!"

Longden leaned his right hand upon his now silent plane and took in with his watchful eye the entire shop, so that every apprentice stopped work and looked at him.

"What? Captain Kidd, the pirate?" exclaimed Winch, with a strong note of interrogation in the tone of his voice.

"Yes, my lad, he and seven of his crew," said Longden. "The rope broke with Captain Kidd, and he fell on his knees a-prayin'. I did likewise, and I've been a prayerful, sober man ever since;" and he surveyed his audience as if ready to challenge any possible questioning of the statement.

"And yet Jack Sheppard looks upon Captain Kidd as a great hero, no less famous than Claude Du Val," said Winch.

"They are all heroes, my lad," said Longden, squaring himself for a speech, "every one of them, cracksmen and thieves, highwaymen and pirates. You'll think so when you see Tom Reynolds, the highwayman, pull up in the condemned cart and quaff a bowl of punch at the 'Crown Tavern,' on the way to the gallows; his friends all around him, ladies handing him nosegays and bouquets, and a mighty crowd cheering him on his way. Why, it comes to this, if you don't keep a check on your imagination, you find yourself envying the one who's to die! I've seen many such sights, and many a hero doing the polite to the hangman, as if the executioner was rendering him a service, and then bowing to the crowd like the king at the end of a procession through the city."

"Well," said Tom Briggs, thrusting his hands into his vast waistcoat pockets, and taking up the parable of the foreman, "we've all got to die, and even Master Longden seems to think Tyburn better than being run over by a waggon or pegging out in a fever."

"That's Jack Sheppard's idea," rejoined Smith; "'a short life and a merry one,' he says."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Longden, with drooping eyelids.

"Oh, I don't know," went on Briggs. "After all, sir, what can be a finer life than a highwayman's; the ladies love him——"

"They do, they do!" exclaimed Winch, grinning.

"The men are afraid of him," continued Briggs; "when he's in luck he lives on the best, and dresses as gorgeous as the Lord Mayor on a fête day. Besides, it isn't every highwayman that comes to the gallows; some of them die of a green old age, in purple and fine linen; I've heard of one that was made a duke."

"You've been reading 'The Joys of the Road;

or, Life in Lace and Ruffles,' " said Longden, reprovingly.

"And a right merry book it is. Jack Sheppard lent it to me."

"I fear poor Jack is walking in the broad path that leads to the——"

"'Black Lion,'" chimed in Smith, with a laugh.

"You don't mean to say he frequents that devil's haunt."

"Yes, I do," Smith replied.

Longden turned to his work for a moment, to say, under his breath, "Forewarned! I must keep clear of the 'Lion' in future and stick to Hockley-in-the-Hole and the 'Cross Shovels,' though I question if Jack would know me in my professional togs."

"Tell us some more, Master Longden, about Tyburn," said Smith, voicing the desire of his companions.

"Your news about Jack Sheppard makes me sad," said Longden, pausing once more in his planing. "But where is the lad this morning?"

"He was here very early, first in fact," said Briggs. "When I came he was cutting his name on that beam," pointing to one of the roof-timbers that gave the shop almost an ecclesiastical appearance, as if the chapel of some old castle had been invaded by the carpenters.

"Cutting his name? The vain young scamp!" said Longden.

"He said he was finishing a box he's been fitting a new lock to," continued Briggs, "made to hold jewels, he said, for one of master's aristocratic customers."

"He's been wasting time on that for a week," said Longden. "Never did a true honest day's work since he's been apprenticed. If young Mistress Wood hadn't such a fancy for him, he'd have been kicked out of this long ago."

THE PROPERTY OF THE

"Go along, Master Longden," answered Briggs; "'the Belle of Wych Street' is not for Jack; she's for Master Eric Beryl, our gentleman apprentice, she is. Mark you that, sir; I know what I am saying."

"Is that so, indeed?" said Longden.

"To be kicked out is just what Jack wants, I believe," remarked Smith. "Bless you, he's quite considered at the 'Black Lion.' Who do you think I saw him talking to only yesterday in the dinner-hour?"

"Who?" exclaimed all the shop at once.

"Master Blake, the man they call Blueskin."

"No!" again exclaimed all the shop.

"It's true," said Smith; "and he was talking to Blueskin as familiarly as a monkey with a bear!"

"Jack makes up in audacity what he lacks in height, for a surety," said Longden, who had it upon his tongue to *exploiter* some of the thieves' slang of the time, for, spite of the risk of being suspected, he liked to air his knowledge of the ways of sin and wickedness, much as he disparaged Jack and his flash literature; but he was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Owen Wood, a rubicund, buxom, middle-aged lady, of affected dress and manners, with black ringlets falling from a broad leghorn hat. She also wore a flowered print dress and brocaded stomacher, carried a basket on her arm and in her shining face an expression of superiority.

"You was askin' where Jack Shepherd is—I heard you as I came in, Master Longden; and that's what I would like to know, the lazy vagabond!" she said, in a by no means musical voice.

"A good-day to you, Mistress Wood," said Longden; "may I relieve you of your basket?"

"Thank you, Master Longden," she said, relinquishing that receptacle. "If I had my way Jack Sheppard need never appear again in this respectable company,

nor any such. Ah, if all the apprentices took pattern by you, Master Longden !"

She accompanied the remark with an ogling smile, and Longden responded with his politest bow.

"But I've said that till it has become a proverb," she went on, "and yet apprentices idle and gamble and take His name in vain ! And what's the good?"

Every apprentice was now busy. The music of plane and saw, punctuated with hammer and mallet, was heard once more right across Wych Street.

"Thank goodness, it can't last for ever," she said; "Master Wood has gone thus early to the city to see about his South Sea Stock; and we hopes, Master Longden—I say we hopes to retire out of town to a house of our own, not to mention it may be something of a mansion, where, however much we may be out of your sphere of society, we shall be glad to see you any day to a dish of tea, be assured."

"Thank you, Mistress Wood," said Longden, gently touching with his boot the toe of her pretty red-heeled shoe, as being the only secret way in which he could show his appreciation of her meaning smile, the apprentices having keen eyes for the unmistakable flirtations of the lady and the foreman.

Smith, however, had noticed Longden's delicate attention, and flung a chunk of wood at him, which missed Longden and grazed the leghorn hat.

"Whatever was that !" the lady exclaimed. "If I thought it was intentional, I'd have every apprentice's indentures cancelled—that indeed would I !"

If the half-finished autograph on Master Wood's timbers was destined to become celebrated, the song which the Idle Apprentice used to sing has become even more lastingly associated with his name; an ancient ditty, which Mr. Harrison Ainsworth printed in his "Rook-

wood," but which has a theatrical and familiar connection with the life of Jack Sheppard that no new version of his history can ignore and no dramatist could possibly think of excluding from the stage.

> "'In the box of a stone jug I was born
> Of a hempen widow, the kid forlorn.
> Fake away!'"

were the words that flowed into the sunny shop as Jack entered, with a "Hello, lads, I thought you were going to Tyburn?" but seeing Mistress Wood, he changed his tone and demurely bade the lady a "Good-day, madam."

"Good-day, indeed!" responded madam, with a frown. "It's the old story: 'when the cat's away, the mice will play.'"

"If anybody else had called you a cat, madam, I'd have knocked him down," said Jack, with a sly chuckle.

"You knock any one down!" she exclaimed, seizing him by the collar of his jerkin and boxing his ears roundly. "I'll teach you to call me a cat!"

"I don't want no teaching," Jack replied, struggling free from her grasp. "You are a cat, and Master Wood knows it; I've heard him say so; and now it's out!"

"Oh, the wretch!" she exclaimed, hot with passion. "Why don't you chastise him, Master Longden?"

"If he does," said Jack, picking up a mallet, "I'll swing for him!"

"You'll swing as it is, anyhow, you scamp!" screamed the lady.

"If I do, it'll be you and Wood drivin' me to it," retorted Jack.

"Oh, hark at the rascal!" replied the outraged lady. "Calls his master 'Wood,' as if he was a lord!"

"Well, he is Wood, ain't he?—Wood by name and Wood by nature—Longden says so."

"What's the matter with the young villain?" said Longden, approaching him threateningly, impeded, however, by Briggs and Smith, ready to defend their fellow-apprentice, Briggs saying, "Look here, Master Longden, it's time we started; we shall be late."

"Yes, we shall be late," said the others, laying aside their tools and beginning to put on their coats.

"Late!" exclaimed Mistress Wood; "what do you mean by late?"

"Master Wood gave us leave to go to Tyburn."

"Oh, very well; if you have leave, go by all means—all but Jack Sheppard; he shall not go, if I have to demean myself by staying in a workshop to see that he doesn't move!"

"He shall not go," said Longden.

"I takes your word, Master Longden. As for me, I've no leisure for holiday-making. I must go to market; but the time will come! I was born a lady, Master Longden."

"And you have remained so, Mistress Wood," replied Longden, taking up her basket and handing it to her.

"Thank you, thank you," she said, with a touching air of quiet indignation as she glanced at Jack. "To think that I should have lived to be called a cat by a low, common, pauper apprentice! But Master Wood shall trounce him for it, I warrant you."

Longden opened the door and bowed her out. When she was beyond earshot, the apprentices mimicked her gait and manner, Jack supplementing their pantomimic opinion in words. "Old spider-face in ringlets!" he said. "Stop me from going, if I wanted to? Poor painted puppet!"

"You're too hard on her, Jack," said Longden.

"Hard on her?" the lad replied. "Why, she's bullied and beaten me, and so's Wood, ever since I've been bound to them; and I've let 'em, like a fool."

"It's amused them, Jack, and it ain't hurt you much," remarked Briggs.

"Oh, hasn't it?" said Jack. "What about my feelin's?" at which he laughed, and they too; whereupon he turned the subject, with the remark, "So you're goin' to see Tom Reynolds, the highwayman, turned off? Well, he's lived his life, and not Sir Walter Raleigh nor King Charles at Whitehall made a finer end than he will."

"You shouldn't read those evil romances, Jack," said Longden, as he adjusted his jerkin and brushed his three-cornered hat.

"Oh, you think I'm spouting from 'The Joys of the Road.' Why, I could write as good a ballad as that myself; and it wouldn't be the first I'd written, mark you."

"Oh, indeed! That is how you waste your time," said Longden.

"If I wrote a ballad on you," retorted Jack, "I should make you a cracksman in the guise of a saint. Ah, ah! Yes; a cracksman, with a snuffle and a 'Yea, verily'!"

Longden made for him angrily, to turn away, laughing with the rest, as Jack, picking up a couple of chisels and presenting them as if they were a brace of snappers, shouted, "Your money or your life!" with a mock-heroic flourish.

"I cry you mercy, Master Claude Du Val," responded Longden, in the spirit of the young humorist.

"Pass on," said Jack, striking an attitude; "I spare you!"

"Come, boys," said Longden, addressing the other apprentices, who were now crowding about the door anxious to depart, but at the same time enjoying the scene

between Jack and the foreman. "And fare you well, Jack. If you're born to be hanged, you'll never die of drowning."

"No," said the others in chorus, as they left the shop, "you'll never die of drowning, Jack!"

"As long as there's a gallows in England," said Jack, going to the window and watching them as they made their way for Holborn, "you'll never die of drowning, Master Longden.

> "'And my dear father, as I've heard say,
> Was a famous merchant of capers gay.
> Nix my dolly! pals, fake away;
> Nix my dolly! pals, fake away!'"

he sung, snapping his fingers to the tune, as he mounted the bench to complete the chiselling of his name upon the hard oak beam, that was one day to become "a cherished relic of Old London."

CHAPTER VII

BLUESKIN CARRIES A MESSAGE TO JACK FROM EDGEWORTH BESS

"I WONDER what Master Wood will say when he sees how I've decorated his rotten old timbers?" said Jack, as he surveyed the inscription, "JACK SHEPPARD." "What he says, he'll be tempted to say with a strap. I wonder I've borne with his heavy hand. If it hadn't been for Ellaline Wood I'd have cut and run long ago. Oh, my eye! what a wretched life mine is compared with Claude Du Val. I've half a mind to give old Wood the slip and turn highwayman."

"Make it a whole mind, my covey," said a rich, deep voice, so close to his ear that it startled him into an attitude of self-defence.

Blueskin, who had stolen in from the street while Jack was engaged chiselling his name on the beam, had hidden behind a balk of timber, and presented himself at this opportune moment.

"A whole mind," he repeated. "Don't palter with a fine resolution."

"How did you get in without my seeing you?"

"The same way that I'll show you how to get in anywhere you wants to, when you apprentice yourself to me, my lad," Blueskin replied; adding, as he looked round the shop cautiously, and more especially at the half-glass door that led to Wood's dwelling-house, "All clear?"

"Yes," said Jack, now quite himself again. "The other apprentices have gone to Tyburn to see Tom Reynolds hanged."

"Poor old Tom!" said Blueskin, with as much feeling as he was capable of. "The fool, to put his head into the noose!"

"You knowed him?"

"Rather! the hot-headed fool! But if you take the risk of bearding the lion, you mustn't complain if you get atween his jaws, eh, my covey?"

"No, I suppose not," said Jack.

"Look here, my covey, don't you be a highwayman; a cracksman's your game; you're made for it, get in anywhere; and with such a trade!"

Blueskin looked at the bench and then at Jack with admiring and wondering eyes.

"Why," he continued, "if I could work a lock like you I'd have been Lord Mayor o' London by now!"

Then he went on tiptoe, though the shavings on the

floor deadened any sound his hardest tread might have made, and took account of the private door and the street door, which he gently closed. "Old Wood at home?"

"No, he's gone to see about his South Sea Stock. They say he's sold at a price that will give him a fortune."

"And the ladies?—God bless 'em," said Blueskin, with a leer.

"Mrs. Wood's gone to Clare Market."

"And my fine gentleman-apprentice, Master Eric Beryl?"

"Do you know Eric?"

"No; a pleasure to come," said Blueskin.

"He's in the counting-house, I expect, making out accounts."

"'The king was in the counting-house counting out his money,'" said Blueskin, jocularly. "Does he ever talk about his father?"

"The king?" said Jack, catching the spirit of the Blueskin humour.

"No, my beaming little covey, Eric Beryl; he had a father, eh?"

"I dessay. You had one, hadn't you?"

"I b'lieve you, my boy."

"They say Eric's father was murdered."

"Do they, now? Master Wild wants you to tell him all about Eric's father! He's a very benevolent covey, Master Wild."

"Is he, though? Seemed to me he could be quite t'other if he wanted to."

"He'd never want to with you, lad."

"I believe Eric Beryl's a nobleman in disguise."

"The devil you do!"

"Odd, a couple of apprentices like us, one's father murdered, and the other died nobody knows how."

"And one apprentice is called 'the Industrious' and the other 'the Idle.'"

"That's me," said Jack, with a laugh.

"Come along o' me, Jack, and I'll show you how to be idle in a velvet coat and lace ruffles, a-quaffing of your wine, with rank and beauty at your feet."

"Like Claude Du Val?" said Jack, eagerly.

"I b'lieve you, my boy!" Blueskin replied, as he took something from a capacious pocket in his ample cloth coat; "can you pick these as easy as you worked the irons for Mr. Wild at the 'Black Lion'?"

He held up a pair of manacles that Jack inspected with a professional smile. Then he thrust his hand into his trousers' pocket, and drew forth a small instrument and a bunch of skeleton keys.

"Easier!" he said, taking the handcuffs to the bench and opening the locks, one after the other, and returning the implements to his visitor.

"Magic!" exclaimed Blueskin. "The conjurer at Bartlemy's a wooden Hottentot at a snuff-shop to you, my covey. Mr. Jonathan Wild rubs his chin when he thinks of the trick you showed him at the 'Black Lion'; and he's no skinflint, isn't Master Wild!"

Whereupon Blueskin, fumbling with a heavy purse, dropped three guineas into Jack's hand, saying, "There's your share of the swag that come of the transaction."

"What transaction?" said Jack, turning the guineas over with undisguised delight.

"Never you mind, my covey; button 'em up. There's heaps more where them come from—every coin of 'em won by honest labour;" which declaration he emphasized with a wink that spread all over one side of his rubicund face. "But that's not what I comes here for on this merry spring morning. To-morrow night there's

to be a sort of swarree at Hockley-in-the-Hole, what they calls a benefit or a friendly lead, for a great cause, not to mention the symposium afterwards at the 'Cross Shovels,' and Mistress Edgeworth Bess sends you her greeting and a hinvite."

"Mistress Edgeworth Bess, who's she?" asked Jack, now deeply engrossed in Blueskin and his tempting suggestions.

"Oh! oh! oh!" laughed Blueskin, slapping his thigh, "he don't know Edgeworth Bess! Oh, the blessed ignorance! Dear, dear! Why, Edgeworth Bess is the beauty of the day; young, witty, rich, sought by noble knights and belted earls, but won't look at 'em, my covey; she's one of us, the belle of our profession, the Venus of what Master Jonathan Wild calls the Olympian games."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Idle Apprentice.

Then, dropping his voice mysteriously, Blueskin advised Jack to keep cool. "She's had her rolling eye on you, my covey, any time this three weeks, and more!"

"On me!" exclaimed Jack, raising himself in his shoes, as if he would reach up to a sudden height of worthiness; for Blueskin plainly intimated that unparalleled honour had fallen upon the lad, who had attracted the rolling eye of Edgeworth Bess, and been deemed worthy of a compliment from Jonathan Wild.

"Never you mind where, my son of Fortunatus; if you was a hemperor you couldn't be luckier than to come atween heaven and the fascinatin' smile of the lovely and lively Edgeworth Bess. You'll accept her ladyship's hinvite to the swarree?"

"I'm not looking for a sweetheart," Jack replied, a little doubtfully.

"Got one already?"

"Well, not exactly, as you may say ; but I've never been to Hockley-in-the-Hole. What's it like?"

"Like! Why, it's the sportsman's heaven on earth ; such exhibitions of the noble art of self-defence as you never dreamt of or read about in books. And visited by the greatest in the land. I've seen Captain Avery himself there, fresh from the stormy deep."

"No!" exclaimed Jack.

"And Bill Horton, the pride of Hounslow Heath."

"Oh, my eye!"

"What are you doing now?"

"Well, I was going to Sir Patrick Brent's in Leicester Fields, to take home this box," pointing to a casket upon the bench close by his hand ; "it belongs to Lady Waller."

"Sir Patrick Brent—Lady Waller?" said Blueskin. "Do you know the lady?"

"No, nor the gentleman either. She's one of Wood's aristocratic customers. We do odd jobs for her when she's in London, though she don't generally stay at Sir Patrick Brent's."

"Oh, you are a clever dog, my covey! 'None but the brave deserve the fair.' It's a jewel-case, ain't it?"

"Yes ; I've been fitting a new lock to it."

"The 'Black Lion's' on the way. It'll do your heart good, the sight of Edgeworth Bess."

"I'll put my coat on," said Jack, taking that garment from a peg, turning down his shirt-sleeves, and arranging his collar, that had something like a lace ruffle stitched into the band of it, the handiwork of Ellaline Wood, who tried to inspire Jack with the same care that Eric Beryl devoted to his toilette ; but in those days Jack had no idea of competing with Eric in the matter of dress. "I mustn't be long away ; now I remember Master Beryl said he wanted to see me, and it was particular."

"No need to stay a minute at the 'Black Lion.' Just wet your whistle and wish 'good luck' to my new pal!"

"Your new pal?"

"Jack Sheppard!" said Blueskin.

"Why, I thought we was almost old friends?"

"From this day forth more than friends," said Blueskin, oracularly; "pals, partners in a great game; sons of Fortune, minions of the moon! I b'lieve you, my boy!" and he slapped Jack on the back with affectionate familiarity. As he did so he observed Mistress Ellaline Wood, a vision of fresh young beauty, posed in the doorway of the house, which gave upon the shop in a couple of wooden steps; and in a whisper he said, "When you sees Edgeworth Bess you'll forget every other sweetheart you ever had in all your life!"

CHAPTER VIII

WHITE LIES AND OTHERS

"I BEG your pardon," said Ellaline, in the sweetest of cheerful voices; "I did not know you had a visitor."

She looked inquiringly at Blueskin, whom Jack, with a ready lie, at once introduced.

"This is Mr. Smith; come about the box for Lady Waller."

"Yes, fair mistress," said Blueskin, "I've come about the box; we've been a-waitin' for it more than a week."

"I finished it this morning—got up at daybreak to do it."

"Yes," said Blueskin, "he got up with the sun, he did."

"The other apprentices have gone to Tyburn, by leave of Mr. Wood."

"Yes," chimed in Blueskin, who watched the two with a calm though alert expression of countenance, "you can't call Master Sheppard an idle apprentice, whatever may be said for the others."

"I am glad to hear you say so," Ellaline replied. "I have often told father that he is unjust to Jack."

"Thank you, my dear young mistress, for my friend, Master Sheppard," said Blueskin, with a bow. "Nothing like being industrious; that's what I've been a-telling him. Many an idle apprentice have come to the gallows, while the industrious have become Lord Mayor of London; look at Master Whittington, for example."

"But he had a fairy cat to watch over him, and a peal of bells to warn and cheer him."

"And who knows but I might find a fairy dog to help me," said Jack.

"Any number of fairy dawgs," said Blueskin, "and as for peals o' bells, I know a veritable chime of 'em that may be relied on to warn and cheer any good, honest apprentice, especially one that Mistress Ellaline Wood takes an interest in."

"You are very good, sir," said the girl, with a curtsey, but with a doubtful glance at Jack, who seemed unduly anxious to propitiate her good opinion of the stranger, who, nevertheless, presented anything but a prepossessing appearance, certainly not one to inspire a maiden either with admiration or confidence.

"I hope so," said Blueskin, turning away to wink for his own entertainment.

"I must go now," said Jack, apologetically, to Ellaline. "Mr. Smith says Lady Waller is expecting me with the box; I'd have taken it before, but thought it was too early in the morning."

"Too early in the morning," repeated Blueskin, in a sing-song tone. "Come along, my boy. Farewell, sweet mistress, and many happy returns of the day;" and he fairly swept the floor with his stiff three-cornered hat, as though it might have been a cavalier bonnet with a feather in it. Passing into the street and onwards, he gave himself over to poetry in a gurgling, not to say chuckling, kind of way, dropping snatches of Jack's excuses and his own tempting suggestions into song; ballad-making was not an uncommon habit of the day, unhampered by the canons that trammel conscientious poetasters:

"'Twas too eraly in the morning,
The casket for to carry,
'Twas never yet too eraly,
A maiden for to marry;
Too late you'll be relenting,
When Edgeworth Bess you see,
And cry, 'My name is Sheppard;
She's the Sheppardess for me!'"

Ellaline went to the window and watched the pair.

"Well, I am sure!" she said, stepping back. "Mr. Smith is actually kissing his hand to me. What a terrible complexion he has! Such a contrast to Jack! What was he saying about sweethearts, I wonder, when I was coming into the shop? Master Smith is turning again. No, I believe he is singing. What a strange man! He seems very fond of Jack. There they go, turning the corner into Drury Lane."

Then with a sigh she cast her eyes in the opposite direction, where she saw Eric Beryl dragging along a heavy trunk, covered with undressed leather and bound with iron bands.

"Surely, here is Eric coming," she said, with a look

of surprise, "and he has a box, too; what's the meaning of that, I wonder?"

She smoothed her pretty flowered dress, arranged the dainty fichu about her throat, looked at her buckled shoes that clasped an ankle worthy of a queen, and waited for Jack's rival.

Though Jack had never declared his love, he had lost no opportunity of winning the girl's good opinion. It is true that in the little scene just enacted he ran a great risk of falling in her estimation. He neither played the part of innocence well, nor was he supported very cleverly by his villainous companion; but Ellaline Wood was an unsophisticated maiden. She naturally took on trust the character and kindly intentions of a messenger from Lady Waller; the more so when he came with compliments for Jack, whose embarrassment she was inclined to put down to undisclosed admiration for herself.

"Why, what have you there, Master Eric?" she said, as the industrious apprentice flung down his trunk.

He looked much more like a young gentleman highly placed than a carpenter's apprentice, though the London lads at holiday time made a fine show in their best clothes. Eric's bright, brown hair fell in curls about his shoulders, and his Sunday jerkin was of rich velvet. The truth is he had always been petted both by Master and Mistress Wood. The latter was proud of his appearance, and Wood, more especially of late years, had encouraged a deep design of suddenly surprising Eric with the secret of his birth, to which belonged rank and wealth. Furthermore, he had long cherished the hope that his gentleman apprentice would marry Ellaline, and thus give him a nobleman for a son-in-law and a titled lady for his daughter. Mistress Wood, on her part, was not a little jealous of Ellaline, whose manners were more *comme il faut* (Mistress Wood was fond of using the phrase with-

out exactly understanding its meaning) than her own, her mother, Wood's first wife, being of very good family; than which declaration nothing was more calculated to irritate his second wife, who was continually boasting of her own descent (she called it "ascent" occasionally, and stuck to it, in spite of Ellaline's correction), and claiming to set Ellaline an example in manners that were *comme il faut* and conduct that was most becoming to a young girl.

"What have I there, Mistress Ellaline? My trunk!"

He emphasized the "mistress" in response to Ellaline's "Master Eric."

"Well, then, Eric, what are you doing with it?"

"I've been packing up, Ellaline," he said.

"Packing up?" she repeated.

"I'm going away," he said, facing her with a sad, half-appealing look in his eyes that were almost as blue as her own, though he had much the stronger chin, which redeemed his face from weakness.

"Going away?" she said.

It seemed to him as if she could do nothing but repeat his words.

"I'm so miserable," he replied.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"You are the matter, you!" he exclaimed. "You!" He approached to take her hand.

"Me!" she said, neither encouraging nor withdrawing from him.

"I love you so," he said, seizing her hand. "Oh, Ellaline! that's why I am going away."

"An odd reason, is it not?" she answered, without the slightest response to the emotion that made him tremble.

"You don't love me ever so little," he said, dropping her hand. "You called me master only this minute; you never call Jack Sheppard master."

"Jack's different."

"I like Jack," said Eric, "and don't want to stand in his way; so I'm going to leave Wych Street."

"What a silly boy you are!"

She was more alert and self-possessed with Eric than she had been in her conversation with Jack and "Mr. Smith."

"I saw you look at Jack yesterday in such a manner that I believe he has won your heart, and I can't stand it."

"Why, you two boys have been laying your heads together to tease me; Jack says a girl can't go on having two sweethearts all her life."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I didn't see why she couldn't."

"You know it's impossible, Ellaline; we are no longer boys, we are men."

"Go along," she answered, with a laugh; and, vaulting upon a bench, swung her feet with coquettish defiance.

The action gave him a pang, but he went on with his protestation.

"If we are not quite men, we soon shall be; and you will have to choose one of us. And I'm going away. I am tired of being dependent; tired of living under a name that doesn't belong to me. I mean to go out into the world, win a career, and clear up the question of my parentage."

"You do!" she exclaimed, jumping from her seat and advancing towards him. "Then you'll come back a lord or something, and you'll want a grand wife, with a stomacher of diamonds and a heart of lead; that's what goes with diamonds, they say."

"If I were a royal prince or the Lord Mayor's son, I should never want any other girl. Oh, Ellaline, say

that when I can offer you my true name, unblemished and free, you will be my wife !"

"How you do go on; you are so romantic !" she said; and once again vaulted into her seat and swung her legs and showed her dainty shoes, but with all innocence, the innocence of young and joyous life. "Do you like to be in the workshop? You used to, before you were advanced, as father calls it, to the counting-house. It's better than the little room in which you pore over account books. Don't you think so? And don't you like the smell of shavings? It's better than the scents mother buys, or even the lavender she puts in the linen chest."

She chattered on now, as if for the sake of talking, and Eric felt the sting of her indifference.

"Goodbye," he said, in the midst of one of her careless interrogatory sentences, and stooped to pick up his trunk. "I want Jack to mend the lock; where is he?"

"I sha'n't say goodbye," Ellaline replied, taking no notice of his question. "And you'll break my heart, if you go on in that cruel way."

"Shall I? Oh, I'm so glad !"

"What a wicked thing to say !" she replied, slipping meekly from the bench and leaning her back against it. "Oh, dear, why can't we continue to be boys and girls? I'm sure I don't want ever to be married and bothered. Look at my father and mother, how they nag each other."

"We should never nag each other, Ellaline."

"Besides, what would Jack say?"

"The question is, do you love Jack best? If you do, and it's for your happiness, I'll give you up; yes, I will, if it kills me !"

"You are so impetuous," she answered, approaching him almost affectionately. "I like you both."

"You can only marry one of us," he replied, more argumentatively than in the spirit of the lover.

"Jack is such a happy fellow, so lively," she answered, with a sunny smile, that faded as she added, "You are not very lively, are you, Eric? But you are kind; yes, you are very kind."

"Oh! I'm glad I'm kind," Eric replied, in a tone of bitter disappointment, as he sat dejectedly upon his trunk and looked into vacancy. "Rather a dull dog, but kind to his mother—as they say."

"There's one thing to be said, nobody's kind to Jack, except me. But it's a great thing to be cheerful, is it not?"

"Jack's very cheerful," said Eric.

"Oh, isn't he!" she answered, eagerly. "Sings such merry songs, and tells such merry stories."

"And will come to such a merry end, if he isn't careful," Eric replied, somewhat viciously.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't ask me," he replied, turning away his head, angrily. "I suppose I'm jealous, and a fool; and I thought I loved Jack, but I hate him!"

"Oh! what a shameful falsehood," said Ellaline. "Jack knows better; he told me you would lay your life down for him, and that he would do the same by you."

"There's not a word I would say behind his back that I would not say to his face. I've often talked to him about the company he keeps, and the evil books he reads; and as you have his welfare so much at heart you'd best warn him yourself."

"And have I not your welfare at heart, Eric?"

"Not in the same way; and I don't want half-love, nor do I want to rob Jack, if he is most preferred."

As he answered her, he went to Jack's locker, that was open to any one, and from beneath an old jerkin and

cloak he pulled forth several well-thumbed volumes and read their titles and commented upon them.

"'The Cracksman,' 'Claude Du Val,' 'The History of Chaste Susannah,' 'The Four Kings, or Child's Best Guide to the Gallows,' 'Frills and Furbelows, or the Beauty of Tyburn,' 'The Highway to Love and Fortune.'"

"Oh, but he has not read all those books to me."

"I hope not."

"Are they so very shocking?" she asked, taking up one of them. "Surely 'Chaste Susannah' is a nice book?"

"If they are not fit for Jack, they certainly are not fit for you," said Eric, huddling them together, flinging them back into the locker, and covering them up as they were previously covered with jerkin and cloak, and banging down the lid and turning sorrowfully to Ellaline. "But there, thank God, you don't know any better."

"Oh, I'm not quite so ignorant as you imagine," she answered, with a pouting lip.

"My darling, whatever you are," said Eric, his words pulsating with a passion that frightened the girl, "whatever you are, I love you with all my heart and soul! You are the one being in all the world I care to live for, the one sweet hope that nerves me for the battle I am going to enter upon this day—to win my way to fortune, to find out who and what I am, if I have a name worthy to offer to the girl I love, and if I have not to make one for myself—even though I perish in the attempt."

He seized her hands and kissed them fervently; and she burst into tears.

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't," she said, and sobbed. "You make me feel wicked and wretched and miserable."

"My dearest!" he answered, and attempted to put

his arm about her; but she drew herself away and wiped her eyes.

"Is that all you have to say?" he asked, in despair, "that I make you miserable?"

"I wish you well, with all my heart, and I'm sure you will become a great man; Jack thinks so," she replied.

"Goodbye," he said, dejectedly, but this time with firmness; "goodbye, Mistress Ellaline Wood." And he took up his trunk and proceeded to leave the shop.

She stepped in front of him. "You shall not go like that, Eric; and you haven't had the lock mended."

"I shall go just like that, Mistress," he said; "and I don't want the lock mended now. What matters a broken lock, if a broken heart is of no account?"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" she exclaimed, breaking down once more in tears; and Eric was fain to lay down his trunk to pacify her.

CHAPTER IX

JACK SHEPPARD MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY

"HELLO, hello!" said a familiar voice at the door, "what's the coil?"

"Oh, Jack," exclaimed Ellaline, drying her eyes, "Master Beryl wants you to mend the lock of his trunk; and he's very disagreeable, says he's going to leave Wych Street, he's tired of us all, and——"

"His name's Master Beryl," interrupted Eric, scornfully.

"There! you see how disagreeable he is," went on Ellaline, "and I'm glad you've come back; he's fond of you; you can make him stay."

"I can, and I will," said Jack.

Eric laughed derisively, and regarded Jack with a proud, scornful stare.

"Oh, come, don't look at your fellow-apprentice in that way," said Jack. "I tell you I'll make you stay, and you shall thank me for making you."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes; and very much indeed. I believe I know all about you, who you are, and everything; found it all out by accident. I came here from Leicester Fields to find you, flying like a Bow Street runner after a pick-pocket."

"Always thinking of thieves and constables, and the like," sneered Eric.

"Never you mind, Master Gentleman Beryl. I dessay I'll prove to those who call you so by way of a nickname that you are Master Gentleman Beryl and a great deal more. You just listen to me; if I don't make you jump, my name ain't Jack Sheppard."

"Go on, Jack," said Ellaline, excitedly. "Don't interrupt him, Master Beryl."

"Master Beryl!" again said Eric, turning away.

"Very well, Eric then, always Eric," Ellaline answered; "but listen to Jack."

Jack glanced at the window, then fastened the street door, and saw that the private door to the house was closed, before he began his story.

"You see," he said, "I takes the jewel-case to Lady Waller, at the house of Sir Patrick Brent, in Leicester Fields. The footman, he says, 'Her ladyship is busy with Sir Patrick, but you can wait;' so I malingers about till I comes to a room with curtains and hears voices—one a lady's, the other a man's; he was saying, 'If it's the portrait of the brat's father, you'd have found him, if he'd been alive; but you know he ain't alive,

and I know that your paramour died the night the brat was drowned.' And the lady, she interrupted him every time he said 'paramour' with the word 'husband.' And then the footman, he come to me and he says, 'Where have you gotten to?' and I says, 'Why here, just where I am, of course.' Then he says, haughty and grand, he says, 'Come this way;' and there, on a couch, I sees a lady, and by her side a fine gentleman in a full-bottomed wig, and in a brocaded suit, and with a dark face, and that proud it made you creep. And I said to myself, 'It's queer, but the lady's voice is the very echo of Eric Beryl's, and she's wonderful like him about the eyes.' Well, I handed her ladyship the casket, and showed her how to lock it. Then she puts her jewels in; and as she was putting in a picture that had shining stones around it, the gentry cove with the dark face he tried to sneak it, and there was a bit of a rumpus between him and the poor sick lady."

Here he took from his pocket a beautifully mounted miniature, hanging to a gold chain, and held it up as he concluded his narrative.

"And when I was locking the casket, the picture caught my eye, and at the same time somehow caught in my sleeve as well, and——"

"You stole it!" exclaimed Eric, impulsively, taking the picture from Jack.

"That's a hard word, Eric, a very hard word."

"Yes, indeed it is," said Ellaline.

"If I could have done such a thing it was for you. Oh, come! You ought to apologise." And probably Eric would have done so, only that Jack seemed anything but serious, and Eric fancied the young scamp had actually winked at Ellaline.

"My heavens!" exclaimed Eric, after gazing closely at the portrait, "who is it like?"

"Your very image!" said Ellaline, taking it into her own hands to examine it.

"The very spit of him!" said Jack. "And at the same time he has the eyes and the voice of Lady Waller; and if that's not the portrait of his father, and Lady Waller is not his mother, why, then call me dolt and fool—aye, and thief, if you like—though I deserve better treatment."

"Yes, you do, Jack; and I'm sure Eric is bursting to thank you."

"My father has always said your parents were gentlefolk," said Ellaline.

"Yes, yes, I know," said Eric.

"Gentlefolk!" exclaimed Jack, with well-acted enthusiasm. "Nobles, Ellaline; dukes and belted earls!"

"Whether you did all this for me," said Eric, looking up from the portrait, "or the diamonds tempted you——"

"Oh, come, that's a nasty one," said Jack—as if jewels and gold could tempt the honest heart of Jack Sheppard! "Oh, come, this is too much; you have cut me to the quick." And Jack turned aside to laugh. It seemed as if he laughed on one side of his mouth and cried with the other, so unreal were both his mirth and dejection on this occasion; the truth being that Blueskin had fanned his vanity to a high pitch of youthful appreciation and promised him fame and fortune in the service of Jonathan Wild. This, with the discovery of the jewel and the possible endowment of Eric with the rank he was hankering after, had made the lad slightly hysterical. He was inclined to both laugh and cry.

"You are very unkind to Jack," said Ellaline.

"Nevertheless, this jewel must be restored to Lady Waller, and at once."

"I'll take it back to her," said Jack.

"No; I'll take it myself. That will clear you; and it

may do more, as you have said and for which I thank you, Jack—it may give me a name and a mother, for it is plain, if Lady Waller is my mother, my father is dead—murdered, perhaps, as Mr. Wood always believed. Come, Jack, let's go. Don't you think I'm right, Ellaline?"

"Yes," she said.

"Come, then," said Eric, taking Jack by the arm, "we will soon be back."

They had not noticed that immediately after Jack had returned to the shop the burly figure of Blueskin had glided in after him, as nimbly as Quilt Arnold might have done, so agile was Wild's active lieutenant in spite of his abundant adipose tissue. Blueskin must have become quickly acquainted with Wood's premises, since it was little more than six weeks previously that he had received instructions to ensnare Sheppard as a handy recruit, and make a convenient prisoner of Eric Beryl. If it were necessary to lime the same twigs for the pretty singing bird, Ellaline, Blueskin was "not to make any bones" about that operation also. Wild did not consider it necessary to enter into any serious plan of operations; he depended upon the discretion of his bold and cunning ally.

"Pardon me," said Bueskin, confronting the two apprentices, "I don't think I'd risk taking the bauble back, not for money, my lads;" which remark he punctuated with a polite bow to Ellaline.

"A fair good-day to you, sweet mistress," he said, with a bow that was intended to be grace itself. It struck Eric as awkward, and worthy of the man's vulgar appearance. "I did not dare to hope we should meet again so soon."

Eric turned to Ellaline for an explanation.

"This is Mr. Smith, the friend of Lady Waller," she said.

"The friend of Lady Waller!" Eric repeated, with surprise.

"Yes, my fine gentleman, though he don't dress in brocades, and flourish a gold-headed cane. But don't you go through life, young sir, judging by appearances; I've seen the king himself in homespun; it ain't always fine feathers that gives you a guarantee of the fine bird!"

"I beg pardon, sir," said Eric. "No offence, I hope."

"Offence, my son; not a mite of it. If I'm the friend of Lady Waller and Sir Patrick Brent, I don't go about proclaiming it like a ballad-maker or the coveys that sing them in the street. The friend of nobility, which I admit, I'm likewise the intimate friend of Master Sheppard and the devoted servant of our fair young mistress, and willing to be yours, sir, if you'll permit of the liberty."

"Oh, sir, Eric did not mean that he regarded it as a liberty," said Ellaline; for there was something threatening in "Mr. Smith's" manner, and his complexion seemed to be developing into an angry hue.

"What should I think of myself if I allowed that rascally fellow Sir Patrick to lay hands on you, when a word from Jonathan Wild would make things soft as velvet, and not only give you, young sir, a title to the portrait, but restore you to your father?"

"Ah, sir," said Eric, "now I fear you promise too much."

Jack began to doubt the sincerity of Blueskin, but felt himself helpless to oppose him, for had he not become, within the hour, not only his friend, but his sworn ally, his comrade in what Blueskin had called a great game, sons of Fortune, minions of the moon!

"You see, young sir, this is how the affair stands," said Blueskin. "Lady Waller reopened the casket be-

fore Master Sheppard was in the street. I happened to be at hand, hurried into the room, found Sir Patrick in a fury and her ladyship half-dead with grief, and——"

Blueskin was making up his story as he went along, and it did not impress Eric as convincing.

"Don't be impatient, young sir," said Blueskin, "I am just as anxious for your welfare as you can be yourself. Sir Patrick at once declared our dear young friend had stolen a jewelled portrait which Lady Waller valued. 'After him,' he said to the servant, 'after him, and find a constable.' 'I beg pardon, Sir Patrick,' I said, 'I know the youth, and am persuaded there must be some mistake; but if you'll leave the matter to me, I'll undertake to recover the jewel, and to arrest the scamp if he has committed this outrage.' I had to appear angry and to call you a scamp, or Sir Patrick would have discovered that I was your friend; and now you must both be guided by me. If the servant and a constable had been here instead of me, you see, he would have had evidence of your guilt, both of you, my innocent coveys; one the thief, the other the receiver."

"Oh, Mr. Smith!" exclaimed Ellaline.

"They've just passed that wicked Act of Parliament that the receiver must be punished as well as the thief—a shameful and a nefarious thing. Now, what I wants you to do—me as is the friend of both, and beholden to this sweet young lady—is to come straightway to the house of Mr. Jonathan Wild, and rely upon his advice and influence. Lord bless you, Lady Waller and Sir Patrick Brent 'll do anything he tells 'em to; anything——"

"I want no advice," said Eric. "This is the portrait of my father, who——"

"Yes, I know," said Blueskin, inwardly chuckling at his unexpected luck in fulfilling Mr. Wild's commission

so quickly. "That makes the affair all the more serious——"

"I will not go to Mr. Wild's," said Eric. "I will go to Lady Waller's."

"You will go to Master Wild's," said Blueskin, firmly.

"We shall see," said Eric, standing apart from the others and thrusting the portrait into his pocket.

At the moment there was a noise in the street, as of an approaching mob.

"If you don't go with me," said Blueskin, "you'll go to St. Giles's Roundhouse or to Newgate with the constables, for here they come."

"Oh, Eric! Oh, Jack!" exclaimed Ellaline, "go with Mr. Smith!"

"Oh, don't argue with them, dear young lady. Youth is so devilish headstrong; it won't never take advantage of the experience of age."

"Come on, Eric; we'd better go with Mr. Smith," said Jack. "Whatever happens, it's me that took the thing; I'm the thief, if there is one."

"Not a bit of it, my boy; you only borrowed it, 'cause it was the image of your pal," said Blueskin.

The noise outside, which had ceased for a moment, now came nearer.

"Come while you're free to come," said Blueskin; and Eric yielded against his better judgment.

The voices in the street sounded angry, and one was shouting above the rest.

"They're only coming from Tyburn," said Jack, reassuring Ellaline.

"It's better to be coming than going," said Blueskin, threateningly; adding, in a persuasive tone, "All the more if the picture's the likeness of the young gentleman's father, why, Mr. Jonathan Wild may be able to match it in his own collection. He's a great man for pic-

tures, is Mr. Jonathan Wild; and kind to young people, woefully kind to young people. Why, bless you, he'll settle this business before you can wink your eye."

"Come on, Eric," said Jack. "Don't worry, Ellaline; we'll be back again in no time."

"I'll follow them," said Ellaline, rushing into the house for her hat and cloak.

By this time the noise in the street was on the very doorstep. Jack was right. It was a crowd of people who had evidently been to Tyburn, or on some other excursion of pleasure. The voice that dominated the others was proclaiming "The last dying speech and confession of Tom Reynolds! Executed this morning at Tyburn!"

CHAPTER X

A HOUSE OF MYSTERY

HOUSES have physiognomies, as men have. If the countenance of Jonathan Wild was sinister, no less so was the appearance of his house in the Old Bailey. It suggested a combination of prison, bank, and fortress. The door seemed to be protected by a knocker that grinned at you devilishly, and when you lifted it and let it fall on the heavy oak panel of the iron-bound door, the hinges of its head groaned and the blow resounded through long corridors.

Ellaline's heart sank within her as she lifted the grim knocker and was presently ushered into Mr. Wild's private room, a panelled apartment, with a great oak mantel, over which hung a portrait of Judge Jeffreys, flanked right and left with groups of prison irons and bludgeons.

On one side of the room was a formidable case of prison curios and relics of burglaries, murders, and Tyburn executions; in the centre a square desk, with a green baize cover, and several red-bound account books. A screen shut off one of the doorways, while another was held by a heavy iron bar.

"Mr. Wild will see you; take a seat," said the porter, or janizary, as Wild called him, an ugly-looking old man, in a kind of official livery, belted and buckled like a prison warder.

Left alone, Ellaline looked about her timidly, but with as much resolution as she could command not to be afraid. She had felt a strange pang of apprehension as the two lads seemed to be led away from Wych Street by the man who called himself Mr. Smith; and now that she was in Mr. Wild's house her doubts of "Mr. Smith" increased, and her fear that it was not well with Jack and Eric was emphasized by the sinister appearance of Mr. Wild's attendant and the room in which she was bidden to wait Mr. Wild's convenience.

Presently she was startled by a voice that bade her "A fair good-day." She had not seen Mr. Wild enter. The truth is he had passed into the room through a sliding panel. He delighted in this and other mysteries of his house, some of which were of his own construction; one, however, was the secret of Mr. Quilt Arnold, as we have already seen.

It was a house of mystery, this abode of Jonathan Wild; mystery of panel and trap-door, mystery of cellar and garret. It had been a strange, weird place before Mr. Wild bought it, and he had increased its grim nooks and corners, and Quilt was master of them all. If Jonathan liked anybody in the world, it was Quilt, with whom now and then he would have a drinking bout, in which they compared notes of villainy; but in his heart Quilt

was an angel of light compared with Wild, and in crime a tame cat contrasted even with the mildest of Wild's officers, servants, and tools.

"Oh, sir!" said Ellaline.

"Your servant," he said, smiling at her evident alarm.

"Are you Mr. Jonathan Wild?" she asked, her hand upon the back of the chair.

"I have that pleasure, my child."

It reassured her when he called her child, his first glance terrifying her.

"Oh! I am Mr. Owen Wood's daughter; Master Sheppard and Master Beryl are my father's apprentices, and——"

"You are anxious about them?"

"Yes, sir."

"I too am anxious," he said. "Pray keep your seat, then I may also sit."

She sat down. He tapped his snuff-box, and contemplated her.

"Where are they, sir?"

"What could have possessed the lad Sheppard to steal Lady Waller's jewel?"

"Oh, he did not steal it, sir."

"I said 'steal,' young mistress; and I am not sure that Master Beryl is not equally guilty in receiving it. The new law says so, though I think the new law is bad law, not to say an outrage; you, however, are too young to understand the nice distinctions of legal and moral ethics."

"Eric Beryl was on his way to restore the trinket, when Mr. Smith met them and urged them to come to you," said Ellaline.

"Mr. Smith?" said Wild.

"The gentleman who accompanied them here; he has a dark complexion."

"His name is Smith, is it?"

"He said both he and you are friends of Lady Waller."

"So we are, my dear, so we are; and in that lies the only hope of your father's two misguided apprentices."

"Oh, tell me, sir, where are they? My father was out when they went away, my step-mother also; and they will be very much alarmed on their return to find none of us at home; and the other apprentices went to Tyburn——"

"To see the end of Tom Reynolds; did they, now? I also was there," he said, with a chuckle that gave Ellaline a cold thrill.

"Let them come home with me, sir," she went on, though as yet she did not know that they were forcibly detained. It seemed to her, however, that instead of being their friend and adviser this man had suddenly become their jailer.

"You may give my compliments to your father, my dear young mistress, and inform him that his two apprentices will be well cared for in St. Giles's Roundhouse until to-morrow morning, when they will be taken before a magistrate, and their innocence established, I hope; but in the meantime he shall hear from me, and he may depend that I will do my best for them."

"St. Giles's Roundhouse!" she said, with parted lips and wide-open eyes. "St. Giles's Roundhouse!"

"Yes, my child; but only for a night, I trust." And he tapped thrice on the panel through which he had entered, whereupon Mr. Quilt glided in with his customary look of inquiry.

"This is Mr. Owen Wood's pretty daughter," said Wild. "Show her out the private way, Quilt, and call a coach and send her home."

"Yes, Mr. Wild," said Quilt. "This way, Mistress Wood, if you please."

She had hardly left the room when Quilt ushered in Sir Patrick Brent.

104968B

CHAPTER XI

"ARCADES AMBO"

"HAVE I the honour to address Mr. Jonathan Wild?" asked Sir Patrick Brent.

"I am Mr. Wild, Sir Patrick," was the cool reply. "Quilt, be good enough to see that we are not disturbed."

Quilt bowed to both gentlemen and left the room. As he closed the door there was apparently a scuffle and a struggle outside, and then a heavy fall.

Sir Patrick looked at Mr. Wild, as if for an explanation. Wild listened for a moment.

"Some person has mistaken his way," said Jonathan, unwilling to permit anything to interfere with their meeting. At the same time he rose, and, passing behind the screen, bolted the door that led to his chamber.

Placing a chair for Sir Patrick and seating himself at his desk, their backs to the panel-entrance that was occasionally used by Jonathan and Quilt, they neither of them saw the panel move, nor the peering eyes of Jack Sheppard brightening the thin line of darkness that gradually increased until it admitted the body of the youngster, who crept behind the screen, where he found upon a table a brace of pistols, loaded and primed. He cocked them, and stood "at attention," his face very pale, his lips compressed together, his whole attitude full of resolution.

"Your messenger was peremptory. What is your business with me, Master Wild?"

"Life itself is peremptory," said Wild. "Will you do me the honour?"

He handed Sir Patrick his snuff-box; and Sir Patrick

having accepted his hospitality to this extent, Mr. Wild looked at him curiously and seemed to be examining him.

"Well?" said Sir Patrick, somewhat impatiently, "do you approve of the cut of my coat?"

"I approve of you generally, sir."

"Damme, sir, do you desire to insult me?" exclaimed Sir Patrick, petulantly, thrusting his chair aside as if he would clear the ground for an encounter.

"Not at all. Pray forgive me. I was trying to recall an eventful night eighteen years ago. But you are greatly changed."

It was Mr. Wild's game to pretend that he had met Sir Patrick at a very critical period of his life. He had imbibed Ferrish's story to the full, and his visit to Brentfield had made him master of Sir Patrick's story.

"What do you mean?"

"I desire to bring to your memory a pretty domestic scene of some eighteen years ago—a cottage by the Thames, a married couple sitting in the firelight, their child cradled between them."

Sir Patrick paced the room, and then stopped suddenly, facing Wild, who kept his seat calmly.

"I see you remember the incident, with its tragic *dénouement;* the stolen child, the murder."

"The father fell in a duel," said Sir Patrick, the words thickly and anxiously uttered.

"He was murdered," retorted Wild.

"Curse you!" exclaimed Sir Patrick, his hand on his sword. "On guard!"

"By all means," replied Wild, taking a pistol from a drawer at his elbow. "At some other time I shall be happy to oblige you with swords. At the moment I have too many engagements to run any risk. I cannot afford even to be wounded, Sir Patrick, at present. And

I know what you are when your blood's up. I was a witness of the murder of Sir Martin Waller, the son of Sir Wilfred, eighteen years ago!"

"What do you mean?" said Sir Patrick, reseating himself sullenly.

"This house holds the records of many mysteries, Sir Patrick Brent, and its owner pulls many strings, political, criminal, and otherwise. Before I ask you to regard me as your friend, I want to show you that it is not safe to make me your enemy. I hold a warrant for your arrest."

Sir Patrick turned a helpless look upon Wild, and waited, but with a murderous thought in his heart.

"Your father disinherited you. He hated the Popish cause. You favoured it. He could not deprive you of your title. But he left the bulk of his estates to your sister. It has been your hope that she would make a will in your favour. You know that she cannot live long. Even now she may be dead on her road home. You affect to believe she was not married to young Waller. She was. You had reasons to regard her child as dead——"

"Enough, sir. What would you?"

"Be your friend—or hang you?" said Wild, with cool effrontery.

It was Jonathan's most constant threat to hang an opponent. He had come to regard "Tyburn tree"' as his own private property. Unfortunately for many a poor devil who had tried to run counter to him, his boast was no idle one. Life was held cheap in those days. You might hang a fellow-creature for stealing the merest trifle, and Wild had in his service approvers and false witnesses. It was as easy for him to swear an innocent man's life away as it was to prove for villainy an alibi in the face of the most conclusive evidence to the contrary.

"Hang me!" said Sir Patrick, whipping out his sword

and forcing himself between Wild and the desk where he had laid aside his pistols.

"Don't be a fool, Sir Patrick," said Wild, endeavouring to edge back, but failing his pistols, laying his hand calmly upon his sword. "Don't compel me to put an abrupt conclusion to negotiations more important to you than to me; to a scheme that, if it was of moment to you eighteen years ago, is more important than ever to-day."

"Rot your yesterdays and to-day!" hissed Sir Patrick; "you are a dead man unless you withdraw your threat."

"I withdraw it," said Wild. "I not only withdraw it, but——"

"To hell with your buts!" said Sir Patrick, putting up his sword. "You have a desperate man to deal with, and one who has no fear. If you mean friendship, well; if it is to be a fight, why, then trust me, I'll have your blood——"

"As you had Waller's?" said Wild, his hand once more on his pistols.

"Aye, as I had his, if that please you," said Sir Patrick; "so out with your infernal plot, and you shall have my answer!"

"Spoken like a man," said Wild. "Listen. That child lives."

"You lie! You possess half a secret and are building upon it to entrap me."

"I say the child lives, is now a handsome, brave young fellow, seeking to discover his parentage and the secret of his birth, which is in my hands. I obtained it on the Thames, eighteen years ago,"

"Man or devil! Which are you?" commented Sir Patrick.

"Only a simple man," said Wild. "Some call me diplomat, spy; not at all. Sir Patrick, I am a simple

man of business, and I keep my word; I promise nothing I cannot fulfil. I have the certificate of the marriage of your sister with Sir Martin Waller, a note touching the birth of their child registered in the name of Thomas. I have a copy of your father's will. I possess all the other documents necessary to prove your nephew's claims to title and estates—and, what is more, the young fellow is under lock and key in this house."

"In this house!" exclaimed Sir Patrick.

"Almost within call."

"Will you swear it?"

"If you value my oath," said Wild, smiling. "You thought Peter Ferrish was your devoted friend and servant?"

"Peter Ferrish?" said Sir Patrick.

"Your accomplice on the night of the murder of the child's father."

"I tell you we fought; it was a duel to the death."

"As you please," said Wild, with a resigned shrug. "And the child?"

"Was accidentally drowned," said Sir Patrick, fairly giving himself up to Jonathan.

"Life is full of accidents ordained of Fate, Sir Patrick. The child, I tell you, is in this house; under lock and key; in my custody."

"Well?" said Sir Patrick.

"Well," repeated Wild.

"What would you do with him?"

"End him," said Jonathan, coldly.

"My God! would you murder him?"

"You call it fighting a duel when you commit a murder," said Wild, gloating over his persistent charge against Sir Patrick. "What other way is there? You have just left your sister, his mother. She may die on the way to her Derbyshire home. She was little fit to

travel, but preferred to risk death on the road rather than submit to further ill-treatment. Shall I let the lad loose, tell him how he may overtake her, assist him to do so that she may publicly acknowledge him, and leave you penniless and hopeless——"

"No, no! not for worlds!" exclaimed Sir Patrick.

"Do you know this picture?"

Jonathan held up the portrait Jack had taken from Lady Waller's jewel-case.

"Yes," said Sir Patrick, putting forth his hand.

"Not yet. It shall be yours, and the documents that establish the heirship of his son, on terms to be agreed between us."

"Name them?"

"Here they are, already prepared," said Wild, taking a document from his desk which Sir Patrick read with evident displeasure; Jack, pistol in hand, risking a peep round the edge of the screen at the puckered face of the murderer and the triumphant smile that played upon the heavy features of Jonathan Wild. The lad never once gave it a thought how he was going to escape from the position which a moment of opportunity and courage had given him.

"A tenth of the estates and investments in the Funds; or say thirteen thousand pounds, with a thousand down. Are you mad?"

"You know what you are entitled to on the death of your sister; you know what barrier stands between you——"

"What would you do?"

"Two foolish lads are in my custody. They stole this trinket. One of them is in my service. He shall give evidence against the other. Or, failing that, I have a professional witness, who has sworn with distinction and success in many courts. It is always desirable to do

these things legally and in form. They will go to St. Giles's Roundhouse. At midnight one of them will be called for. In the morning he will be missing. It will be said he has escaped; but he will be taken aboard my sloop, the 'Fairlight'—and the rest is easy. You see, I am frankness itself. I have no desire to disguise from you a single feature of my plans; and in order that you may convince yourself of the identity of this lad, who calls himself Eric Beryl, but is in reality the son and heir of your sister Lady Waller and also heir to the Brent title and estates."

Sir Patrick paced the room, making no attempt to disguise his emotion and anxiety.

"You prefer not to see the lad? You may see him without being seen. There are bars to his cell."

"His cell—where?"

"Here, Sir Patrick. I have my own little prison, as well as my Newgate!"

"Your Newgate!" said Sir Patrick. "You know how to boast; and some believe you, no doubt."

"You do not. That is why I would rather you set eyes upon the youngster. Otherwise, in one of your doubting moods, you may think I deceived you. He is a handsome lad—brown flowing locks, an open, fearless countenance, deep blue eyes, and the carriage and demeanour of a gentleman."

"My God, spare me! You conjure up in my memory his father; I can see him now—the scapegrace!"

"Who carried off your sister—and she must have been a beauty in her time," said Jonathan, rubbing into Sir Patrick's consciousness the fact that he was indeed master of the story of the Derbyshire romance and the tragedy of the river.

"I am content," said Sir Patrick, taking up his hat. "When shall I hear from you?"

"The day you are master of your own destiny. Every man is master of his own destiny that has the courage to face it with a stiff lip and sinews strung for the combat."

There was a knock at the wainscoat.

"Enter," said Wild.

"There is a messenger on horseback anxious to speak with Sir Patrick Brent," said Quilt.

"My servant, probably. I left word that if he returned and did not find me in Leicester Fields, he might ride on to your house, Mr. Wild."

"Will you see him here?"

"If you please; but he brings no secret message. Pray do not leave."

"Let him enter, Quilt."

"Yes, sir," said Quilt, closing the panel and opening the door that led to the street, and almost immediately returning with Hallett, Sir Patrick's man, who had ridden after Lady Waller to report to Sir Patrick her condition; for it had seemed to him that she was dying when she insisted upon travelling.

"Sir Patrick—my lord, oh, my dear master!" said the man, "your sister is dead!"

"I've killed her!" exclaimed Sir Patrick, sinking into a chair.

"No doubt," said Wild, with a knowing glance at Quilt; "but I would not confess it to all the world."

Whether Sir Patrick heard the remark or not, he made no reply, but sat with his face buried in his hands.

"Call a coach for Sir Patrick," said Wild, to the janizary, who had followed Hallett to the door.

Sir Patrick nodded his thanks, and turning to his man, said—

"Take your news to Leicester Fields, and await my further instructions."

The man departed; and Quilt slipped behind the screen and unlocked the door.

"I'll risk it," Jack Sheppard whispered, by way of protest to an urgent expression from Quilt. "I'll risk it."

"The fates are with us," said Wild, as he attended Sir Patrick to the door, "and we are playing a great game."

"But with loaded dice," replied the other, in a tone of regret.

"In that case the last throw wins," thought Wild.

"Adieu, until I hear from you again," said Sir Patrick.

"And I throw last," Wild remarked.

Laughing in a painfully hilarious fashion, he opened a cupboard near his desk, and taking out a square black bottle, filled a tumbler, and holding it up to the light, said, "Your health, Jonathan, and confusion to Sir Patrick Brent!" and did full justice to the toast in as fine a quality of brandy as had ever evaded His Majesty's Customs.

"The City Marshal is in attendance," said Quilt, entering from behind the screen, and somewhat ostentatiously sliding back the panel that led to the private closet where Wild received his most secret visitors, and where he invariably sat in council with the City Marshal, his confederate and tool.

"He too shall toast Dame Fortune," said Wild, taking up the square black bottle.

"I had already ventured to place a bottle of canary on the table," said Quilt.

"Wise old Quilt!" exclaimed Jonathan, pinching his lieutenant's ear, a mode of approval, if not of endearment, solely reserved for Quilt. "You shall die rich, Quilt, rich and respected, and your epitaph shall be, 'He was true to his word.'"

CHAPTER XII

A GRIM LOVE STORY

QUILT slipped the button that held the panel from exterior force. Wild had all kinds of appliances to check surprises, in case his traps should at any time be discovered. His cautious lieutenant also bolted the outer door.

"Come out," he said, as if addressing the screen.

Jack Sheppard appeared, a pistol in each hand.

"You owe your life to me," said Quilt.

"Perhaps Master Wild owes his life to you also."

"Would you have shot him?"

"In self-defence," said Jack.

"I am a coward, Master Sheppard; never fired a pistol in my life, though I can fence with the best of experts. What strength I have is the cunning of the fox."

"And the fox has a nasty knack of snapping."

"I never snap, my friend; I know a better way; but I admire courage. Bill Horton's my model, and I shouldn't wonder you may come next."

"Indeed!" said Jack, suspiciously. "What were these pistols laid on the table in there for?"

"Any case of emergency. Mr. Wild is generally well-armed; and it's lucky for you he did not hear your attack on poor old Abrahams. You've hurt Abrahams; he ought to have ironed you, like the other, and would, only Master Wild warned us that you were in the service."

"Oh, he did, did he?" said Jack.

"I've salved Abrahams' wounds. Ours is a difficult service. Abrahams is a mild jailer; a poor devil, he was

easily bribed to silence, and I like to stand well with a new recruit. You are Blueskin's pal?"

"A scoundrel, nevertheless," Jack replied.

"Lay down those pistols," said Quilt, "and get back before Mr. Wild returns."

"Where is my friend and companion?"

"Close at hand."

"Why did they put the irons on his wrists?"

"He is not one of us, you see," said Quilt; "but you should know best. Did you not overhear the conversation of Mr. Wild and his visitor?"

"Oh, that's your game, is it?" said Jack. "Very well, then, I didn't hear a word."

"You don't trust me," replied Quilt. "Hark! S—s—sh!"

Jack listened. Quilt took from his breast a small pistol.

"It's the best weapon of the three," he said. "Those you have are Mr. Wild's; this is mine. Take it, and the flask and bullets, in token of my friendship for you —the old soldier's gift to the young recruit—and go to old Abrahams and beg his pardon."

Jack, now convinced of Quilt's sincerity, suffered himself to be conducted back to his quarters.

"The young dare-devil!" said Quilt, with an approving smile, as he unbuttoned the panel, "none the more to be conciliated because he is discreet; wouldn't repeat a word he had overheard, though Sir Patrick and Master Wild must have had some terrible confidences. The lad's my friend, at all events, and may be useful. Master Wild said I was to treat him well. I'm safe on that side; and Blueskin seems to have taken to the lad—he hated having him kept in durance. But Master Wild knows his own business best—or at least, he thinks he does!"

This latter remark fell from Quilt's thin lips with his

most reflective and introspective smile; and he took his seat in a chair opposite to that of his chief, where they often sat in company, engaged in what Wild called "the business of the State." This consisted mostly in exacting the middleman's commission from the robber and the robbed, a cunning art which we shall hope, in the course of this narrative, to observe in operation.

Quilt had nibbed his quill, and mused and looked over one of the private ledgers of the "business of the State," and otherwise occupied himself in doing nothing but thinking of what he had done and what he hoped to achieve, when Master Wild re-entered, not "the worse" for liquor, but "the better," as he always contended when he indulged a little more freely than usual.

"What was the disturbance during my interview with Sir Patrick Brent?" Wild asked, lurching into a seat. "Fasten the door, Quilt."

Quilt fastened the door.

"What is going on in the counting-house?"

"Several quantities of lost property are being registered."

"We are not to be disturbed, Quilt; say Master Jonathan Wild is abroad for the remainder of the day."

"Yes, sir," said Quilt, disappearing for several minutes; and returning, to find Wild with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his legs stretched beneath the desk, and his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"What were we discussing, Quilt?"

"You inquired about a slight disturbance in the corridor."

"That's so."

"Master Sheppard made a dash for the street."

"Did he, though!"

"Knocked old Abrahams down full-tilt, and would have escaped, had I not come to the jailer's assistance;"

which was a lie; but they swopped lies, these cunning gentlemen, the master and the servant, and Quilt understood how to play upon that very crooked and hideous instrument, Master Wild's vanity. "You said he was a clever young imp, sir."

"I reckoned him up on the instant, Quilt."

"It was as pretty a bit of practice as you could wish to see, Master Wild; he put his foot between the door and the jamb, as Abrahams was about to lock it, and before the old man knew where he was his head was on the floor and his heels in the air."

Wild leaned back and chuckled; supplementing his laughter, however, with the remark, "But he must be disciplined, Quilt. He's got in him the making of a master cracksman. Blueskin employed him in that little affair in Covent Garden. The lad picked the lock, and let himself out of the top window, down the spout, with the agility of a monkey."

"A clever young dog," said Quilt, almost genial in his effort to fall in with the humour of Wild's half-drunken mood.

"I'll tell you a secret, Quilt," said Wild, pulling himself together. "Not many of my secrets you do not know, eh?"

"You have honoured and favoured me with your confidence these ten years and more."

"And you have been faithful," said Wild.

"It is the only return I can make for your kindness," Quilt replied.

"And if you hadn't—well, no matter. I was going to tell you about Sheppard; he might have been my own son, so to speak. Did it ever occur to you, Quilt, that my 'Rebuke to Human Vanity' was really a portrait?"

"Yes, sir; you have always said it was a portrait, but never mentioned the name."

"Quite right, Quilt, quite right; listen, and I'll tell you. When I first came to London I met a young woman who pleased me, an honest and virtuous young woman. You may laugh, Quilt——"

"I did not venture to laugh, sir."

"But you may; damme, laugh, if you like! She took my fancy; and she married Tom Sheppard. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I promised myself I'd hang him, and I swore it. But they nabbed me for disturbing the peace in a brawl; and while I was matriculating in Newgate for the high and mighty position I have attained to, the villain died honestly in his bed, mourned by his wife and son!"

"It was hard on you," said Quilt.

"It was damnable! I never swore to hang a man that I didn't do it, except in one instance; the picture in the vault below is the portrait of Tom Sheppard, whom I vowed to hang and didn't. One day I'll hang his son!"

He chuckled at the thought, and repeated the threat in a drunken way; and looked at Quilt for his approval, and got it promptly.

"And 'twill be a just revenge," said Quilt, who never found flattery too fulsome nor approval of a wicked deed too emphatic when Master Wild had been drinking.

"Quilt, to-day's work will fill our coffers; but we must find the packet Ferrish showed me. 'Twas lucky he described the contents. Fortune favoured my discoveries at Brentfield. We will lay our hands on Wood's papers. He keeps them at the bank. Do you believe in witchcraft, Quilt?"

"Not I, 'i faith, sir," said Quilt.

"Then what the devil did Ferrish do with the packet that will be needed before our scheme is complete?"

"You saw it, you say?"

"Saw it!—had my hand upon it," said Wild.

"He could not have carried it with him to the grave," said Quilt.

"If I thought he had, I'd drag him out. Are there rats in the place, Quilt?"

"No doubt, sir, many; they come up along the Fleet ditch."

"Rats have been known to carry off papers, to make their nests withal; and there is a form of witchcraft that makes use of animals. We must find Ferrish's packet."

"We must," said Quilt; "and we will, be assured."

"You know your life is in my hands."

"Yes," said Quilt.

"I could hang you any day."

"On false testimony, Master Wild."

"False or true, what's the odds! But did I ever say I'd hang you, Quilt?"

"Never, sir."

"When we bank Sir Patrick Brent's money, there's a thousand pounds for you, Quilt, and the papers that would convict you."

"Thank you, Master Wild. I am content as I am, your trusted servant, whom you have honoured by the endearing title of friend."

"But mark me, Quilt, if ever you betray me——"

"Oh, Master Wild, you do me wrong to harbour such a thought for a moment," Quilt replied, with well-acted emotion.

"You are right, Quilt," he said, rising from his seat. "Wine talks, brandy's a braggart. Until I met you, I have never known a man who did not deceive me—damme, I'd rather trust a woman! Come to Mistress Wild's parlour, and she shall make us a dish of tea. Tea sobers a man, and Mistress Wild has a soothing temper."

"She is kindness itself," said Quilt.

"It pays her, Quilt. At what hour do you go to the Roundhouse?"

"At dusk, as you appointed."

"You take a *posse* with you?"

"As you directed."

"The prisoners in a hackney coach?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your rebuke touched me, Quilt; let us say no more about it. Mistress Wild shall give us a muffin with our tea, Quilt; and a dash of brandy won't hurt you. Yet I'm glad you were not in the room when Ferrish laid his packet on the table and it vanished, almost at the moment I put out my hand to take it."

"Rats," said Quilt, "rats!"

Wild contemplated him curiously for a moment. Quilt returned his gaze with a look of innocence that would have become the face of a cherub on a tombstone.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK SHEPPARD MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF EDGEWORTH BESS

"THIS way, ladies," said Master Price, the keeper of St. Giles's Roundhouse, one of London's well-known local or parochial prisons; "this way."

He carried a halberd with ostentation and spoke in a voice of authority. The ladies were Miss Elizabeth Lyon, otherwise Edgeworth Bess, and her friend Dolly Cooke. They had been on a visit of condolence to Bill Horton, whose capture Wild had not been long in achieving. It had been meanly done, through the unconscious aid of Mistress Cooke, who called herself Mistress William

Horton, and was probably the more devoted and reliable that she was, nevertheless, an unmarried woman. It is said of certain ladies of the East End that they prefer to "keep house" (a modern euphemism of the problem play) with their dossers than accord to them the privilege of jumping upon them, which is supposed to be conferred by the formality of married lines, endorsed either by priest or registrar. Before Horton had taken time to consider whether Wild would honourably forget the little joke of the North Road, the arch-traitor had professed to Mistress Cooke a mission of importance in Bill's interest, and for his safety, that had induced her to open her rooms to one Dowling, a spy of Wild's, who surprised Horton in bed, and aided and supported by several of the City Marshal's men, carried him to St. Giles's Roundhouse, where he had been held for several days.

"I could cut my heart out for having been made such a fool of," said Mistress Cooke, her bosom swelling with genuine emotion, "to think that instead of warning the dear pal I should have been the cause of trapping him."

"What could Wild have had against him?" said Bess, "that puzzles me. Look here, old dunderhead, how much to open Bill Horton's door?"

"Nothing to open it, Mistress," said Price, with a cunning grin. "How much not to shut it is what you mean, I'm thinking."

"That's the ticket," said Bess; "and here's a guinea to get the idea into your noddle."

"I never refuses the gifts of honesty nor the tributes of beauty," the keeper replied, closing his claw-like fingers upon the woman's gold; "but it ain't no good your thinking I can release Master Horton without a warrant so to do, properly signed and sealed."

"So you won't help us, though Bill Horton has done you many a good service?"

"And will again, I hope," said Price. "And now it's time you quitted the Roundhouse. I assure you I be as sorry to have you go as the merry gentleman in durance be; it's very kind when beauty visits gallantry in distress."

"Don't you beauty us, you varmint!" exclaimed Bess.

"We'd have you keep your place, if you've no heart to feel what we suffer," added Dolly Cooke-Horton.

"Dear, dear! Never quarrel with the keeper of the Roundhouse; you don't know when you may want to call him friend."

"We want to call you friend now, if you'd let us," said Mistress Cooke, appealingly; "and you insult us with compliments that are out of place, when what we look for is a helping hand."

"I asks your pardon, I'm sure," said Price, fondling the haft of his halberd; "I did not mean to offend so great a lady." And then he chuckled, and reiterated his intimation that they should take their leave.

"Look here, Master Price," said Bess, "serious, my friend, serious; guineas talk better than an Old Bailey lawyer. What do you say to fifty, and we'll trust you?"

"What do I say!" exclaimed Price, who was under Wild's thumb for a bit of forgery, not to mention a lesser crime, that would hang him all the same if Wild chose to put the law in motion. "What do I say?" and he assumed an air of virtuous performance of duty that was sublime. "If you made it a hundred, aye, or raised it to a thousand, it couldn't be done. I be sworn to do my duty to my king and country."

"Your king and country!" said Bess, slapping him on the shoulder with a vigour that made him stagger. "You mean Jonathan Wild, you old fox!"

"I charge you not to be disrespectful to the keeper of the Roundhouse, Mistress Lyon."

"Don't call me Lyon; they calls me Edgeworth Bess, them that loves me, and I don't want you for an enemy, much as I despise you."

"If Master Jonathan wants Bill Horton kep' close, why, it's more important to me than kings and countries, I can tell you. It would be as much as my head's worth if I listened to your wily innuendoes; so there; that's my answer, and it don't make me your enemy, either."

"So be it, old whittle-spinner. Shake hands," said Bess.

"I've no time for what Master Horton calls philandering, but there's my hand, Mistress Edgeworth Bess," replied the keeper, whose friendly surrender was interrupted by the noise of falling bolts and bars.

The three turned, to see the inner gate of the great hall opened to Quilt Arnold, attended by several of Wild's janizaries, in charge of two prisoners, Jack Sheppard and Eric Beryl; Jack Sheppard free in respect of the physical restraint of manacles that hampered Eric Beryl. The circlet for the wrists, held by chains, unlike the modern handcuffs, gave liberty to a prisoner's arms, and Eric walked with a certain unrestrained dignity that excited the admiration and sympathy of the ladies.

"Master Quilt Arnold! Why, this be an honour," said the keeper; "next to that of a visit from the great Jonathan Wild himself."

"Thank you, Price," said Quilt.

"Why surely," exclaimed Edgeworth Bess, "this must be Jack Sheppard!"

A characteristic meeting of Bess and Sheppard, under characteristic circumstances, anticipating the formal introduction promised by Blueskin.

"Are you Edgeworth Bess?" asked Jack, surveying her ample and impressive charms.

"That's me, my lad!" she said, with a genial smile, and pushing back her hat and the curls that seemed to obstruct her full view of the dapper apprentice.

"Ah, ah, my sweetheart, I kiss your hand!" said Jack, with a daring and not unsuccessful effort at gallantry, inspired by the invitation of a handsome, buxom young woman, at whose feet, according to Blueskin, lords and dukes and belted earls languished in vain.

"Oh, you are a funny little covey!"

"Funny!" said Jack, pulling himself up to his full height, which was considerably under the ordinary standard of man, though the lad was well made, as neat a figure as you could wish to see, and with a merry eye and a voice that might have belonged to a far more imposing anatomy.

"Well, we'll not say funny, my lad; let us say the prettiest little fellow a despairing maid might hope to lay her despairing eyes upon!" And then she laughed and showed her white teeth, and set Jack's heart beating at such a pace that, had Blueskin been present, he could not have failed to rejoice that he had not over-estimated the impression Bess would make when they should meet, Bess being willing to honour the lad with what Blueskin called her fascinating smile.

"And haven't you a word for me?" said Mistress Cooke, who had dried her eyes and for the moment forgotten Bill Horton, in the natural desire of a pretty woman not to be overlooked when there is anything like love-making going on.

"A thousand, my full-blown rose!" said Jack. And you might have thought he had been accustomed to ladies' society ever since he had signed his indentures, so entirely at home was he with these reigning beauties

of the Mint and Hockley, not to mention, on special nights, Ranelagh, and, masked, even in still higher walks of the gay world.

"Here, ladies, this won't do," said the keeper, laying his hand upon Bess as she was about to administer a chaste salute upon the pursed-up lips of Master Sheppard.

"Go away!" said Bess. "How dare you lay your hand on me. There, don't you see Master Quilt wants to speak with you."

This, fortunately for Jack and Eric, was true. Quilt stood in the doorway beckoning Price to the ante-room. As Price joined him, Master Isaacs, the Jew, one of the Roundhouse warders, posted himself inside the portal.

"Are you dumb, young man?" said Mistress Cooke to Eric, who was sitting on a bench in the furthermost corner of the apartment, his eyes bent upon the floor, his attitude, which at first had been defiant, now one of dejection.

Eric turned away sadly, and the woman sat down by his side.

"Nay, my lad, don't think I want to jest. I'm trying to be light-hearted, and I don't feel it. I'm sorry for you, whatever you've done."

"I have done nothing," said Eric.

"What are you here for?" Bess asked, examining Jack with an inquiring glance, which also comprehended his friend.

"Amusement, I assure you," said Jack, with an assumption of gaiety; "come to inspect the prison: two gentlemen on their travels, seeing life;" at which Isaacs had to laugh, in spite of himself.

"Well, good-night," said Bess. "You may kiss my hand again."

As Jack took the fair, plump hand in his, he moved

aside, and Bess turned to him in what Isaacs thought was a loving attitude that did not concern him, so he devoted his attention to Eric and Mistress Cooke, who were sitting side by side, and the lady seemed to be crying.

"What's outside them bars?" asked Jack in a whisper, pointing to a window about eight or ten feet from the ground.

"The leads," said Bess, in the same quick, confidential tone.

"Beyond?"

"The churchyard."

"How far to the leads?"

"Twenty feet."

"Will you have a coach outside the church in half an hour, and wait for me?"

"As sure as you're alive. And drive you to Hockley-in-the-Hole; and your friend too. Master Blake said you would come."

"Master Blake! Curse him!" said Jack, between his teeth.

"Don't curse him, my lad, he's your best friend."

"Best friend, indeed; it's through him we're here."

"Then it's for your good."

"No, I'm hanged if it is."

"You'll see. Whatever you may think, trust him."

"I'll trust you, if you lead me to the devil."

"You will? Then, by my soul, I'll stand by you, my lad. I like you."

"Love at first sight," said Jack; and as she stooped, as if to whisper a secret, he kissed her with the confidence and pride of conquest.

"Here, now! Out you goes, ladies," said Price, returning. "Show these ladies to their coach, Isaacs, and at once."

Jack and Bess proceeded to shake hands with each other. Mistress Cooke bade Eric a formal "good-night;" and Price and Isaacs bustled the ladies out anything but ceremoniously.

"The jades! They've no sense of the dignity of authority," said Price, "and I am sorry, Master Quilt, that you should have been a witness to so much insubordination."

"Don't mention it, Master Price. Mistress Edgeworth Bess is a privileged person. I deliver these prisoners, Jack Sheppard and Eric Beryl, to you. Master Wild hoped to wait upon you himself, but he is otherwise engaged. These are your instructions."

He handed a paper to the keeper, who thrust it into his belt.

"I thank you, sir," said Price. "The Roundhouse is full; I don't know where I'm to stow 'em; but I'll answer for their safety."

"Good-night, Master Keeper," said Quilt, "and you, Master Sheppard, and you, sir, Master Sheppard's friend. Good-night to you, and I'm sorry to leave you under lock and key."

As Quilt left, he took an opportunity to signal Jack; but the lad saw no meaning in it, unless it was only intended as a warning to respect his confidence.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRISON-BREAKER'S FIRST EXPLOIT

MASTER PRICE picked up a lantern in the ante-room, and pushing Jack aside, who had followed him to the door, held up the light to read his instructions. Mean-

while Jack took careful note of the fastenings of the place, looked up at the unglazed but heavily grated window, and down at the barred door, opposite the general entrance.

"Mr. Keeper," he said, when Price had unfolded his document and fastened it in his belt, "where does that gridiron of a door lead to?"

"It ought to lead to your cell, my fine fellow; but every cell's full; you'll have to make shift for the night here, where you be. I can give you a blanket or two, and breakfast in the morning—if you be not called for at midnight."

"That's just about the time we expect our coach, Master Keeper," said Jack. "Till then, are we to have the honour of your company?"

"I sleeps in the next room," Price replied; "and am right tired, and was just thinkin' of goin' to rest, when you was brought in."

"What, and with such pretty company to keep you up as yonder ladies?"

"Pretty enough, but none of my company. I'll go and fetch you the blankets."

As the keeper was closing the door behind him, Jack put his foot in the way while he looked out into the anteroom.

"You young imp, what be you a-doin' of?" exclaimed Price.

"I was not a-doin' of nothing," said Jack, mocking him in tone and gesture.

"Take care you don't do it again, or I'll have you in irons. Why you ain't a-sportin' the bracelets, like your companion, I don't know; but Master Wild is a kind gentleman."

"He is; oh, he is!" said Jack; and the door slammed, this time without obstruction.

"Look here, Eric, keep up the dumps strong when the keeper's on hand; but the minute we're left to ourselves, you've got to be lively as an eel and spry as a weasel."

"Your conduct is disgraceful," said Eric.

"In what way?" Jack asked innocently, his eyes on the grated window.

"With those women!"

"Oh, rot it, Eric; don't be squeamish. We're in a tight place, and we've got to make the best of it."

"You have, no doubt, having made the worst of it. I always feared your vicious reading and worse companions would bring trouble upon all of us."

"Oh, hang it, don't preach! It ain't my fault you're here so much as your own."

"How dare you say so?" exclaimed Eric, starting to his feet with anger.

"Hush! my lad. Come nearer," said Jack. "If I made you jump when I showed you that picture of your father, I'll make you leap out of your skin in a second. Hush!"

Jack crept to the door, and listened.

"What do you mean?"

"That picture *is* the portrait of your father. That dark devil I told you of, who made my flesh creep, murdered him. You are the heir to titles and estates. Don't ask me how I know; I'll tell you some other time. But you are to follow your father by a violent death; the dark devil, or Wild, or both of 'em, mean to murder you," Jack replied, his voice husky with anxiety.

"Murder me!" exclaimed Eric.

"That's what I said—and to-night. Wild has a sloop in the river off Gravesend; they'll get you aboard—'and the rest is easy.' I heard Wild say so. But I mean to be a match for Master Jonathan Wild, if you'll be guided by me."

"My God! Can I believe what you say?"

"As surely as you'd believe in the word of Ellaline Wood."

"Poor Ellaline!" said Eric. "I only wish you were worthy of her, Jack—not that I am, but you never will be!"

"Oh, come! you are hard on your fellow-apprentice," Jack replied.

"I believe Ellaline loves you, Jack; you are so cheerful, so reckless, and care so little for her."

"Care! Why, I'd die for her! But oh, my eye, did you ever see a woman so handsome as Edgeworth Bess?"

"You should be ashamed to mention her in the same breath as Ellaline Wood."

"I beg her pardon. But you are tetchy, Eric; and you've got pluck, too, a-talking of love and Ellaline when your life's in danger, every minute we're here. Give me your hand, dear pal."

Eric put out his hand, as gracefully as his irons would permit.

"Not like that; I don't want to shake it, you innocent," said Jack, as he drew a tool from his pocket and began to work upon the manacles, relieving one of Eric's hands as quickly as he had unlocked the bracelets in Wood's shop for the edification and instruction of Blueskin.

"Do you carry a tool-chest in your pocket?" said Eric, smiling for the first time.

"Always," said Jack, intent upon the other iron band, which he presently unfastened. "And look here, Eric, this is a pistol. I'll shove it in your breast-pocket; and this is a powder-horn, and these are bullets. There you are; button 'em up, and don't use 'em if you can help it; but if you do use 'em, by the memory of Claude Du

Val and every other hero of the road, let 'em have it, hot and strong."

Eric, with patient wonder, suffered himself to be relieved of his shackles and armed.

"The keeper's coming," said Jack; "sit down on your bench, and hold your irons as if they were fast. That's it; you're getting on. While I'm talking to the keeper, you can offer up a little prayer for the triumph of Virtue over Vice; it can do no harm, it may do good. Hush! here he comes, the old fool! I'd like to snatch his halberd and pin him to the floor; and I will, if he don't mind."

"There you are," said the keeper, after a great fuss of bolts, bars, and grating locks. "There's three blankets —two for comfort, one for luck. Now, wrap yourselves up and go to sleep. That's where I'm off to, the land of Nod. It's been a tiring day with me."

"What! Ain't we going to have no supper?" said Jack.

"No; you're going to bed, and behave yourself, like your friend."

"What, by nine o'clock?"

"Ain't it dark enough for you? Look here, my fine fellow, if you be obstreperous, you'll have the shackles put on your wrists, like your friend, and what's more, you'll be ironed as well, d'ye hear? Now, go to bed; you ought to have brought your nuss with you, you did!"

As the keeper retired, Jack once more followed him, this time to take a serious survey of the outer hall, where a light was burning.

"You imp! I'll have you in irons, as sure as my name's Price!" said the keeper, slamming the door, and locking and barring it with more than his customary clatter.

"Only wanted to see what our chances are that way," said Jack. "They are nix. Two warders, besides the keeper; Master Quilt not far off, perhaps, though I don't fear him much. But Wild and his hellish partner, Sir Patrick, may be here—midnight was their hour; we've a good two hours to work in, if they don't come before. That's our way out!"

He pointed to the grated window.

"We're on the second storey. Lend a hand."

Eric placed his irons carefully on the floor, and assisted Jack to carry his bench beneath the grated window.

"'In the box of a stone jug I was born,'"

hummed Jack, as he vaulted upon the bench. "Come up, Eric."

Eric was on the bench in an instant.

"Bend your back; not for leapfrog, in that holiday fashion."

Jack, with Eric for a footstool, laid hold of the window bars and perched himself on the narrow ledge.

"'Of a hempen widow, all forlorn!'"

he went on humming. "A drop of twenty feet to the leads."

He thrust his eager face between the bars for a moment, and then, looking down at Eric, said, "There's lots of houses and roofs. It's going to be moonlight soon, if it don't rain; smells fresh and sweet outside. If we can't let ourselves down into the churchyard straight, we can work the roofs, and get through one of the houses or down a spout. A good idea; there's a spout on the left of the window; that'll ease you. Hush! Somebody stirring."

The bench was quickly replaced, and the two lads ready to receive visitors; Eric calmly snoozing in his

former seat, Jack humming a tune under his blankets on the floor.

"A false alarm," said Jack, after a few anxious minutes, as he began to tear up his blankets.

"First, I must get two at least of those bars out. May want a rope; easily make one out of these things. Come on, once more."

They moved the bench, and Jack swung himself to his perch. Taking a chisel from his pocket, he began to work at the base of one of the bars.

"Get a brick out, and you can pull a house down," he said.

After a time he began to excavate at the top of the bar, prizing at the stone above, and varying his operations by digging into the mortar of the bricks below.

"As rotten as a pear," he whispered, looking down at Eric. "Hold the blanket; catch everything I send down, so as to make no noise."

A piece of brick fell into the blanket, then a bit of mortar. Presently a whole brick almost jerked the blanket out of Eric's hands. Then Jack began to tug at one of the bars, his legs all the time on the other side of the window, so that he had a good purchase on anything he pulled at. A fortunate thing the moon had so far failed to put in an appearance, or some keen-sighted citizen might have observed the strange appearance of the prison window.

"Now, my covey, as that damned scoundrel, Blueskin, is always calling one, look out; gently, my boy, the bar's coming."

Jack lifted the bar, and unfortunately with a clatter of masonry that went pelting down to the leads; at which he sighed, and sat dead-still for some minutes. He put his face close into the larger aperture, and looked into the night and listened.

"No harm done, Eric; nobody stirring, and it's beginning to rain, thank God!" at which moment great splashes of a thunder-shower rattled upon the roof and pelted in at the unglazed window. "Can you reach the end of the bar? It's heavy, mark you."

Eric stood on tip-toe, and took the first of the two bars that it was necessary to remove before they could squeeze through the window.

> "'Nix my dolly! pals, fake away,
> Nix my dolly! pals fake away!'"

hummed Jack, in what Eric considered rather a reckless fashion; but Jack knew what he was about, for, as he hummed his tune, he turned his face towards the cell, remarking to Eric, "That old fool, Price, will think I'm singing myself to sleep; might be good for you to snore, Eric."

Eric was too anxious to do aught but watch and wait upon Jack.

"It's life or death, Eric, my boy. If Providence and this chisel don't do the trick, you're a dead 'un, and they'll twist my neck too; so stand by, hard and fast, lad, and keep your ears open."

Once more Jack went to work, prizing out bricks and mortar, and in time handing down the second bar to his companion, who took it skilfully and laid it by the side of the other one.

"All's well!" Jack whispered; Eric looking up at the prison-breaker, as Jack wiped his chisel on his jerkin and replaced it in a breast-pocket, and then, drawing in his legs, clung to the sill of the window and looked out.

"Raining as if your prayers had been answered, Eric, but fiendishly dark; a light in the lower part of the tower of the Roundhouse. A bracing of the chimney to rest upon, and a spout on the left hand and not too close

to the bricks; handhold and foothold. But suppose we make a rope, eh? I don't want you to break your neck to save it. You can see the leads, plain enough; they're shining with the rain. There's lights in the windows of some of the houses, and a lantern hangs out this side the porch. When you're up here, you'll get accustomed to the light, or the darkness, in a minute or two, and see for yourself."

With which warning and comment, Jack slipped down upon Eric's shoulders, and sat himself comfortably on the bench. His confidence was a little shaken by a noise in the ante-room. He picked up one of the iron bars.

"Look to your pistol, Eric. Life or death; life for the strongest, death for the weakest."

Once more it was a false alarm.

"Better make a rope, I think," said Jack; and he set to, vigorously, on the blankets, and when the three were torn into thick strips and tied together, the two lads tested them in a kind of tug-of-war struggle, which the material bore without a tear.

Jack fastened one end securely around Eric's waist, and pulled at him with all his might.

"Firm as a Tyburn rope," he said; and Eric shuddered at the simile. "Up you go."

Jack bent his back, but Eric had to fairly climb upon his shoulders before he could pull himself to the window-sill by the remaining bars, which groaned and shook as he strained upon them, the adjacent masonry being considerably loosened.

"Now, my lad, tie the rope to the two bars, a double twist and a double knot; they'll hold, fast enough; leave a length slack, for me to haul myself up by."

Eric obeyed; and Jack, catching hold of the loose end, tested it.

"That'll do, my lad; I can swing on that—old Mother

Wood predicts I'll swing anyhow, the smug-faced ape! Now then, out with one leg after the other; that's it; well done, Eric; now the other." Eric obeyed. "Now then, feel for the spout;—no, not with your hands, you fool, with your foot. That's the game. Feel it?"

"Yes," said Eric.

"Out you go, then. Stick to the rope, and don't let go the spout. When you're landed, whistle, and let the rope loose."

Eric disappeared for a moment, and lifting his face to the window, said, "I'm safe, Jack;" and then the bars of the window began to groan again.

"Hold on, my iron jailers; don't give; I ain't working at you; there's no chisel at your roots," said Jack, apostrophizing the remaining bars.

A low, long whistle announced the success of Eric. Jack laid hold of the inside length of rope, vaulted to the window, and was outside with the agility of a monkey. As he swung into the rainy night, he paused to look back and fairly shout with triumph, "Ah, ah, old Go-to-bed! Ah, ah, Master Jonathan Wild! I done yer! I done yer!"

CHAPTER XV

A NIGHT AT PRESTON'S BEAR GARDEN

THERE was the devil to pay that night at Hockley-in-the-Hole, otherwise Preston's Bear Garden. Special arrangements had been made by the enterprising proprietor to escort such of his patrons who might be subjected to inconvenience on their way to Clerkenwell by the undue attentions of footpads and highwaymen. Novel attractions were introduced for the occasion, which was the

benefit of the management. A "wild bull" was baited by a famous fighting dog for three guineas, "the money to be spent"; there was a sword and dagger fight between two eminent Frenchmen, a "cocking," in which noted birds were matched for five guineas; a battle with bludgeons, the drawing of a badger, and other entertainments characteristic of the refined and elegant manners and customs of the period.

The gardens were partially illuminated with coloured lamps. A new arbour-bar had been built, and fresh casks and jars of liquid laid in; choice canary and the fiercest of strong waters. The drinking-parlours were as primitive as the sports and pastimes, but the scene on a great night was full of life and colour. Cocked hats, wide cuffs, buckled shoes, and both tie and flowing wigs, were general. Among the women there were powdered and patched hussies, with masks and fans, and whaleboned petticoats that were trying to male shins. This gay apparel was in artistic contrast with the more sober costumes of those who rather chose to disguise their quality than to expose themselves to the envious designs of knaves and sharpers. At the entrance gate were ranged sedan chairs and coaches, well attended with links and torches and hired defenders.

The most undemonstrative of the visitors were Tom Winch and our friend Longden, who was fulfilling a long-delayed promise to Mr. Owen Wood's eldest apprentice. It was the lad's birthday, and, moreover, he was in the last months of his indentures, and likely to become a master himself, by reason of a nice little property and cash in the bank left to him by his uncle. He had made overtures to Master Longden to join him in business. Master Longden was tickled with the lad's confidence in his honesty and skill, and had promised to consider his proposal. A sly dog, Longden! He had more irons in

the fire than soldering-irons or pokers, and had already laid by a tidy sum for a rainy day, but in a far more romantic line of trade than that which Tom Winch was destined for.

"Yes, my lad," said Longden, pushing his way towards a table outside one of the lamp-lighted arbours, "the fellow in the high boots, broad belt and broader buckle, and the rough-striped shirt—that's the celebrated Captain Avery; they call him the Pirate King. He married the daughter of the Great Mogul and lived like a biblical monarch, with forty wives and a thousand slaves; they made ballads on him and a play called 'The Successful Pirate,' though now he's reduced to doing a bit of smuggling for a living, between Thames and Holland. Just come up the river, I dare be bound, with a cargo; but a right jovial fellow, and as fine a seaman as ever defied a hurricane."

"You know all the famous characters, Master Longden."

"I've made 'em a study, Winch. If a man has to avoid wickedness, he must first know what wickedness is, eh, my friend?"

"Why, of course," said Winch, his eyes all over the place to discover whatever wickedness there was to be seen. What most attracted him was a couple of brazen huzzies, with low-cut bodices, sitting on the knees of two swaggering gentlemen of the road. Winch was not surprised that the ladies wore masks, though he felt envious of the swashbucklers, who seemed to defy the whole world.

It was at a table close by that Captain Avery was carousing with several of his crew. Whatever discipline the captain might exact from his men at sea, they were equals ashore, and a ruffianly, truculent lot they were!

"Hallo, there, my Jack-a-dandy!" roared Captain Avery, addressing Longden, "come and join us." Winch noticed that Master Avery wore his hair and jet-black beard in curious knots or ringlets, like the pictures of the Egyptian warriors in his mother's big Bible. "Who's your mate?" asked the captain, looking at Winch.

"This, most noble captain," said Longden, with a flourish of his hat, "is my Lord Mackenzie of the Isles."

Longden nudged Winch, who, though a little taken aback, returned the salute of Avery, and the lad's modesty gave colour to Longden's grandiloquent introduction.

"Mackenzie, my Lord of the Isles, do us the honour," said Avery, making room for the lad and Longden on the benches near the table. "Me and my crew of the 'Mary Jane's' home from the Indies, and we're toasting the flag we love."

"Here's to you, my brave rovers of the sea," said Longden, taking the pewter flagon that was offered to him and emptying it at a draught. Winch, accepting a much smaller vessel, succeeded in following his example. Then Longden begged permission to contribute a bottle or two of canary to the general joy of the table, and the Avery crew and their friends became as conspicuous in their corner of the gardens as the paid entertainers, who were busy here and there exhibiting their prowess in various ways, and promoting the sports and pastimes lavishly provided for an appreciative and courageous public.

"Welcome, my son of Fortune, and you, my Lord of the Isles, welcome to the crew of the 'Mary Jane'!" roared Avery, as Preston's waiters uncorked the wine Master Longden had ordered.

Presently, as if by general intuition, everybody seemed to shout, "A song, captain! Silence, for a song by Captain Avery!" The captain wiped his lips and protested, while several of his crew began to light their pipes, into the bowls of which they had been thrusting wedges of a very dark tobacco. They were evidently in for a night of it, and meant to keep their legs well fixed under Avery's table, more especially since he had won to their entertainment a couple of generous recruits. Winch was surprised at the reckless way in which Longden let his money fly.

"Oh, shiver my timbers!" exclaimed Avery, "you knows I never remembers the words; and, if I could, why, it would be always the same old song."

"Let's have it!" they shouted, "the same old song!" And straightway they began to sing the chorus by way of encouragement—

> "'On board of the "Mary Jane," my boys,
> On board of the "Mary Jane"!'"

Under ordinary circumstances it would seem rather premature to start the chorus of a song before the vocalist had set the tune, but this singing of a song by Captain Avery was a familiar piece of pleasantry and affectation.

"You've hit the chorus to a marvel," said Avery, "and here goes for the song. If I break down, why, you must pick me up, as the lady said to the sailor."

"Tune up, old ringlets!" exclaimed Longden, tossing off a full glass, and filling up with a view to another. "And here's your health and song, beforehand!"

The crew looked slightly askance at Longden. They did not approve of his reference to Avery's hairdressing, any more than they admired Avery's hirsute eccentricities; but Avery was too busy clearing his throat for his song to notice the remark.

"Here goes, my hearties," he said, and in a deep, guttural voice he managed to get through the first verse—

"'She was a cutter bold and free,
And sailed the stormy main,
Her flag had flown on every sea,
The flag of the "Mary Jane."
The flag of the "Mary Jane," my boys,
The flag of the "Mary Jane"!'"

The chorus was the great thing about the song in the estimation of the crew, and the humour of the performance consisted in the eager way in which they waited for their captain to break down, so that in the moment of hesitation they might rush in with, "On board of the 'Mary Jane,' my boys," which they did with right hearty energy, the smokers waving their pipes, the others raising their mugs and glasses.

"'We'd hardly sailed a league, a league,
A league on the stormy main,
When up against the Eastern sky . . .
When up agen' the Eastern sky . . .'"
"'On board o' the "Mary Jane," my boys,
On board o' the "Mary Jane"!'"

shouted the chorus.

The third verse threatened to be a complete blank. Avery shook his head and his grim-looking ringlets, and dropped, not into song, but into apology.

"It's no use, my lads, I can't remember a word of it."

"'On board o' the "Mary Jane," my boys,
On board o' the "Mary Jane"!'"

again roared the chorus, delighted that Avery's memory was defective, seeing that it gave them their opportunity.

"'The fight it raged from morn till night,
The blood it flowed like rain,
And the storm rose high (*with energetic hesitation*),
And the storm rose high . . .
And . . .'"

"'On board o' the "Mary Jane," my boys,
On board o' the "Mary Jane"!'"

came the chorus, loud and lusty.

"'So drink long life to the Pirate King,
May his glory never wane;
And . . . (*anxious hesitation*)
And hurrah . . . (*abject attitude of apology*)
Hurrah for the flag that . . .'"

"'On board o' the "Mary Jane," my boys,
On board o' the "Mary Jane"!'"

once more pealed out, the chorus coming to the captain's rescue. His mutilated ditty being concluded, they sang the chorus again, and everybody who heard it cried, "Bravo, Avery!" and some started the chorus afresh on their own account.

Then there was a general movement towards the stage, where a master of great fame in the art of defence encountered another with sword and dagger. They began by shaking hands to show that there was no malice aforethought in their meeting, and straightway attacked with a determination to slice each other's flesh to ribands. The crowd fought for good places to witness the bloodshed. Men struck each other (one was stabbed) in their excitement, and women screamed with emotion. From the small gallery above the stage several dames, masked and unmasked, leaned forward eagerly and cheered the combatants.

It was a lively combat. The men watched each other like tigers. They displayed great resource. There was

no nonsense about the encounter. It was not a mere fight for gate money. The men were well backed, and they had reputations to maintain. They both bore honourable scars in token of the earnestness of their work and the honesty of their profession. They were the modern gladiators. At length first blood was scored amidst a shout of approval. The wounded swordsman fell back, his face covered with blood. He remained in retreat, however, but a few minutes, and sallied out smiling death to his adversary, whom he straightway cut across the dagger-arm. By way of interlude the spectators fought a little among themselves. The one with his head bound, the other with his left arm bandaged, the warriors resumed the conflict. For some time they baffled each other with amazing skill, until at last the more seriously hurt of the two fell into the arms of his squire with his leg laid open. This concluded the encounter. The wound was examined by a doctor and sewn up on the stage, which done, the heroes shook hands once more, and the stage was cleared for one of the most novel and brutal exhibitions that ever disgraced Hockley, not to mention the worst form of bull and badger baiting. Lest one should be critically charged with delaying the interest of the main story which we are relating, it will be convenient to relegate the incident to the place of a footnote.*

---

* "In 1722 there was a remarkable encounter between two women dressed for the purpose in close-fitting jackets, short petticoats, Holland drawers, white stockings and pumps. The challenge and acceptance which passed between these viragoes, who for the first time appeared on a public stage to settle their differences, and to satisfy a morbid craving for novelty on the part of the *habitués* of the place, are amusing: 'I, Elizabeth Wilkinson, of Clerkenwell, having had some words with Hannah Highfield, and requiring satisfaction, do invite her to meet me

Neat-limbed, sporting-looking grooms now led a leash of dogs from the stable in the rear of the stage and passed towards the badger-pit; while others, with low foreheads and heavy jaws, crossed them with game-cocks under their arms. In the more shaded and sheltered corners of the gardens, and near Avery's favourite table, many men and a few women had remained, taking but little interest in the proceedings outside their own groups of debauchees; some were drinking hard, others playing cards, some singing with drunken hilarity, and it was glaringly apparent to Winch and other more or less innocent spectators that some of the women were as drunk as the men, and not a few were lolling upon their "fancy men" with a shocking disregard of the evident proprieties. Apart from the rest a stalwart fellow, in a cloak and hat that partly enveloped his dark face, stretched himself in a corner, with a beaker of liquor on one hand and a huge leaden tobacco-box on the other. He had evidently taken more wine than was good for him; but he seemed to be watchful, not so much of what was going on about him as of every new-comer.

Suddenly Longden, looking in the direction of one of the private ways into the gardens, caught sight of an advancing group that troubled him. "Jack and Edgeworth Bess!" he said to himself; "the young reprobate! I

---

on the stage and box with me for three guineas, each woman holding half a crown in each hand, and the first woman that drops the money to lose the battle.' This was to prevent the women from scratching each other. The acceptance is curious: 'I, Hannah Highfield, of Newgate Market, hearing the resolution of Elizabeth, will not fail to give her more blows than words, desiring home blows, and from her no favour.' They maintained the battle with great valour for a long time, to the no small satisfaction of the spectators."—"Pink's History of Clerkenwell," and the *London Journal*, 1772.

knew the 'Black Lion' would do for him. Another clever thief in the hands of Jonathan Wild." Then, taking Winch by the arm, he said, "Come along, lad, it's time we went homewards."

"But there's a mad bull to be dressed up with fireworks and turned loose, and a mad ass to be baited," remonstrated the lad, a rough programme of the sports in his hand.

"Enough's as good as a feast," Longden replied.

"And a cat to be tied to the bull's tail," urged the lad.

"I'll tie you there if you don't come," threatened Longden, taking him by the collar and hurrying him away, to the great indignation of the lad, who turned angrily, but was urged forward with a grip of iron.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE OF HOCKLEY-IN-THE-HOLE

LONGDEN considered it to be of the last importance that Jack Sheppard should not see him at Hockley, though he took more serious chances by his undisguised presence there than might come of his discovery by Jack Sheppard. Longden had received more than one intimation that to be free of the roads about London Jonathan Wild's licence was necessary. Already he had been spotted by the man in the cloak and slouched hat; but Blueskin did not object to see Wild's authority disregarded. It did not follow because Blueskin served Wild that he loved him. In his heart he admired the few men who scoured the frontiers of Wild's kingdom and paid no toll, who held their own, free and independent. He

would have gloried in it himself; but Wild's net was wide and deep, and since he had been entrapped therein and released, he had suffered naught by his occasional revolts. He had promised to meet Bess and a few pals at Hockley, and Jack Sheppard was to be initiated into a phase of life that was calculated to surprise and delight him. Wild had taken what Blueskin considered to be a mean advantage of his success at Wych Street to box Jack, and at the same time to refuse any explanation of his intentions towards Jack's fellow-apprentice. "Show me your cards," Blueskin had said, "and I knows how to play the game you calls; that's been our understanding up to now." Wild had replied, "It's not always convenient for the general to explain his plan of campaign to his subordinate officers; theirs is the duty and the pleasure of obedience." "Then, cripple me, Master Wild, you must find another officer to serve under them conditions." "As you please," said Wild, taking an unusually heavy pinch of snuff with a vicious flourish, and thrusting the box into his pouch without inviting his lieutenant to partake, a sufficient indication of anger to be a threat, and a brutal one. Nevertheless, Blueskin took up his hat and unceremoniously left the room, to make his way to a corner of Leicester Fields, where Edgeworth Bess had a lodging, known only to the Hortons, as she called Mistress Cooke and Bill, and to Blueskin; a very snug and pretty lodging, in charge of a faithful old servant, a woman who had nursed Bess down in the country when she was the petted infant of her father's farm, Arcadian days that Bess did not care to remember.

"She had an instinct as you'd come," said the woman, "and so I was to tell you, and she's shot at a pigeon and killed a crow; which means that Bill Horton's held by the heel, but the other legged it clever, and will be at

Hockley, she hopes, having just gone to fetch him in a coach; and you'd better be uncommon fly, it may be more than old Preston's benefit; cloaks were made before breeches."

Blueskin embraced the faithful abigail; and it was soon after, as we shall see, to use a modern euphemism, that "the band began to play."

"Do I love you?" Jack was saying, as he swaggered into the gardens with Bess on his arm, Bess judiciously masked. "Do I love you? Does a duck swim?"

"It swims, and it likewise drinks," said Bess. "Here, waiter—you—anybody; a stoup of wine!"

"Let it be canary, eh, Bess?" said Jack.

"Canary it is, my lad," she replied. "Sit down."

They sat by a table outside one of the arbours, all of which were now pretty full. The night, after the short though sharp rainstorm, being fresh and inviting, a bright moon above and the scent of the open country neutralised the smell of oil and tallow and the straw and sawdust of Preston's Bear Garden, where the bears appeared to be mostly bulls and dogs, not to mention human animals no less savage, though there were notable exceptions among the visitors and *habitués* who looked on; such, for instance, as Master Hogarth and Master Gay, both of whom studied life at Preston's.

"Poor Eric! he's a shy 'un," said Jack, looking at Eric and Mistress Cooke, Eric almost as bashful as a girl, Mistress Cooke trying in vain to find some consolation for the absence of Bill Horton in a fresh young love.

"Shy as a wench with her first lover," said Bess.

"Come along," said Polly Cooke. "Why, I never see such a molly-coddle."

Eric, with a protesting smile, quietly evaded the encouraging embrace of Mistress Cooke, and edging up to Jack, said, "Let's get out of this."

"Get out of it!" exclaimed Jack. "Why, the fun's only just beginning."

"Here you be, my Lady Edgeworth," said the waiter, a shabby, bald-headed old man, with a wet lip and a leery eye, placing a flagon of wine and glasses upon the table.

"That's well, old turnip-top. Now, my jovial pals, sit and let us make a night of it!"

"Why did we come here?" asked Eric, in a half-whisper to Jack.

"For safety," Jack replied; and then, in an aside, to Bess, "and for mirth and jollity, eh, my beauty?"

"That's it, my bold huntsman," replied Bess; "here's to you!" and she raised her long glass with anything but a maidenly flourish and emptied its soul-inspiring contents.

"Here's courage to *you*!" said Mistress Cooke, drinking to Eric.

"I hate this place," said Eric to Jack. "Besides, the hue and cry is out; we shall be taken."

"Taken!" exclaimed Bess, who overheard the remark, though she seemed to be engaged in captivating the company at the adjoining table. Everybody had begun to pay attention to her since she had removed her mask and exposed her handsome face to Hockley-in-the-Hole, irrespective of persons. "Taken! Pooh!" and she left her seat to speak with Avery. "Does any officer of the law ever put his nose into Hockley, my hero of the briny deep?"

"Never, my nymph of the sea! And if he did, we'd eat him alive!"

"I tell you they are on our heels," said Eric. "Wild, Quilt, and all the constables. Did you think we were going to get off scot-free?"

"What, coming to Hockley?" said Mistress Cooke. "How could they know we were here?"

"The youngster's a fool," said Avery, pushing his way through a crowd that was moving from the sword and dagger exhibition to the bull-baiting, and making for the principal entrance, to return hurriedly with them, exclaiming, "By the skull and cross-bones of the 'Mary Jane,' but here comes Jonathan Wild himself!"

"Jonathan Wild!" said his crew, almost in one voice.

"Yes, my hearties. Take your orders from me. To the right!—march!—and the song is—

> "'On board of the "Mary Jane," my boys,
> On board of the "Mary Jane"!'"

which they piped in low tones as they proceeded to leave the area.

"You cowards!" shouted Jack. "Won't you stand to your guns?"

"We never fights ashore," said Avery, twisting the longest ringlet in his beard, "and never agen' Master Wild. We b'long to the 'Mary Jane,' we do!" And Wild might have heard the dying chorus, as he laid under arrest the janitors of the Gardens and placed men of his own within the portals.

"The constables!" cried the elderly servitor, whom Bess had nick-named Old Turnip-top; and the cry was instantly taken up.

"The constables!" exclaimed one of the swordsmen, his weapon in his hand. "What do constables want at Hockley?"

"Aye, aye!" shouted the manager; "we are a peaceable assembly."

"We sha'n't be so long," exclaimed a stalwart wrestler, standing by the side of the swordsman.

Jack shook himself free of Bess; Eric remembered his pistol.

"Get out of this, my covey," said the quiet man with

the pipe and the half-hidden face, stalking out of his corner; "get out of it, quick. We don't want to quarrel with Master Wild."

"Oh, hang Master Wild!" said Jack in a frenzy.

"He'll hang us if we are not careful," said the other.

"What! Blueskin?" exclaimed Jack.

"S—s—sh!" was the cautious reply.

"You said I was your pal."

"So you are, my lad; and Blueskin 'll stand by you!"

"Dear old Blue!" said Bess in a whisper.

"You'll stand by? Then fight for me and save my friend, Eric Beryl; it's him they want. There he stands; you'll see how Wild will make for him."

"In the name of the law!" came clear and strong in the voice of Jonathan Wild, as he entered at the head of a *posse* of his men.

"What's the law to do at Hockley?" shouted the swordsman.

"Lay you by the heels, you scum of the town!"

"Scum of the town! D'ye hear, pals? he calls you scum!"

"Seize me yonder thief," said Wild, pointing to Eric; "the young scamp with the brown hair and the baby face."

"He's no thief!" shouted Jack, addressing the crowd that now began to menace Wild. "He's a gentleman; Wild wants to murder him for his estates."

"Liar!" said Wild.

"And you'll find him no baby!" screamed Eric, maddened at the contemptuous tone of Wild.

"To the rescue, boys!" shouted Jack, flinging off his coat, and snatching up a cudgel that lay by the table.

"Do your duty to your king and the law," said Wild, drawing his sword.

"Down with Jonathan Wild!" cried Bess, suddenly heading the crowd, a pistol in each hand.

"Hurrah for Edgeworth Bess!" was echoed through the grounds.

"We've had enough of Jonathan Wild's tyranny!" yelled a new-comer, shabby to his lips, a victim only that day released from Newgate, on a charge as false as any that had ever been made by Wild's creatures against an honest man.

Quilt, in a half-hearted way, Wild's fierce eyes upon him, made for Eric Beryl, supported by a couple of constables. Wild remorsely cut down the poor devil who had exclaimed against his tyranny, and went for Jack; at which moment, flinging aside his disguise, Blueskin interposed, a sword in one hand, a snapper in the other.

"No, I'm damned if you do, Master Wild!" he said, presenting arms with an earnestness that staggered his chief.

"Blueskin! Blueskin!" yelled the crowd. "Down with Jonathan Wild!" added Bess; and Wild's men fell back before the angry defence of the liberty of Preston's Bear Garden.

"Blueskin!" hissed Wild. "Curse you! Are you all in revolt against me?"

"On this occasion, Master Wild, we are, we are!" said Blueskin.

"Blueskin! Blueskin!" again shouted the crowd, brandishing its various weapons.

"A guinea for every prisoner; and a free pardon for every man and woman that surrenders!" shouted Wild. "At 'em, lads!"

The fight now began in earnest. Wild's strongest henchman lowered his halberd at the swordsman, who, cleverly warding it, cut the halberdier across the face, and almost at the same instant was run through by Isaacs,

the Jew. Eric emptied his pistol into the breast of Master Price, but was seized from behind and gagged, in spite of the opposition of Bess, who fought with the butt end of a pistol, without heeding the red stream that was pouring down her face from the cowardly blow of Wild himself. "For the king!" he continually shouted, while Isaacs screamed, "For the law!" Quilt was more than once pressed into a tight corner, but he was a fine swordsman, and held his own so long as he could keep a clear space between himself and his assailants. Jack fought like a demon, with cudgel, fists, and boots; wriggled out of the clutches of Wild, butted his stiffest retainer in the stomach, crept between the legs of another to smite him behind the ear. Blueskin hurled men right and left. Nevertheless, Wild gradually won, point by point. Several wounded men surrendered, and others, who knew that to fall into Wild's hands meant Tyburn, made their escape. With a cut across his forehead that gave him a ghastly appearance, Wild laid about him vengefully. At last, when the defenders of Hockley saw Blueskin tied by the heels, a gag in his mouth, they shouted, "Quarter! quarter!" and the battle was over; Wild victorious all along the line, Jack Sheppard in the grip of a trio of his janizaries, Bess and Poll in tears, Bess wiping more than tears from her pale face, Eric on his way already to the sloop on the river, and Blueskin speechless with mortification and a broken arm.

Such was the battle of Hockley-in-the-Hole, fought, as was claimed by the defeated, in the cause of innocence and liberty, and won by a lawless tyrant and his cruel mercenaries.

CHAPTER XVII

TRUTH, TRADITION, AND THE ECCENTRICITIES OF LOVE

AND now began that extraordinary career of crime and prison-breaking that has made the name of Jack Sheppard notorious, and that time will make famous. He will probably live, at some future day, as the successor of Jack the Giant-killer, or the Fortunate Youth gifted with a talisman such as Aladdin might have possessed, that overmastered locks, bolts, and bars. He will be attended by the Magician Blueskin, brother to the famous Bluebeard, at first his enemy, but eventually his willing slave. They will be in league against the machinations of the wicked Jonathanwildus, the Giant of the Castle Bailey. Jack will make up in cunning and the gifts of opening barred doors what he lacks in stature; and when at last Jonathanwildus has invoked the aid of the great Marshals of the State and the Executioner with his axe, and the lad is bound for death, Blueskin, the Magician, will suddenly appear in their midst, with smiths and men-at-arms, and will hand to Jack the talisman which Bess, the Siren, had lured from him, and so for a time left him to the mercy of Jonathanwildus. Blueskin and Jack will thereupon triumph over Jonathanwildus and the great Marshals, and will hold a mighty feast, at which Lord Woden of the Fields will give to Jack his beautiful daughter, Elfrida, in marriage. Jack, thereafter, will reign not simply on an earthly throne, but in all youthful hearts. Such is the optimistic and purifying influence of romance and tradition.

Tradition is frequently a great truth. It is never wholly without having deep roots in the verities. The legend of "Jack the Shepherd" that future antiquaries and romancists will construct for the children of light in the days when railway trains have become mythical, and ballooning the common method of travel will have had its beginnings in Wych Street and Newgate. The story will run merrily through the antique leaflets and ballads of dead and gone chapmen and the leather-lunged hawkers of the streets, who, in our day, have laid aside the last dying speeches of felons for the realities of battles, murders, and sudden deaths, set forth every hour of the day by morning and evening papers, in recurrent and sensational editions. Jack's adventures, at first crudely proclaimed, soon inspired the muse of the novelist, and touched the heart of the poet, gave life to stage-plays and mirth to grand opera. According to these pleasant authorities, Jack shed all that was vile in his character, and lived again, a bright new life in history's ideal mirror of fiction. The realism even of the last days of the nineteenth century has failed to relegate him to the gutter whence he sprung. It has, indeed, pleased the tolerant and prosaic world to exalt his courage into heroism, and endow his comrades with perpetual youth. He lives with us in a portrait from the easel of the king's painter, and in many a rare volume dear to bibliophiles. Sinbad the Sailor is no more a myth than Jack the Shepherd of future centuries. It may be that Jack will, in some versions, have an old man of the land to carry, as Sinbad had his old man of the sea. He will most assuredly marry a royal princess, and the king's painter, in those coming days, will make him a type of youthful beauty, decked in garments worthy of his rank and rivalling the exquisite costumes and jewels of his lovely bride. In the meantime we must be content to

have him as real to us as Oliver Twist, and Jonathan Wild a no less historic figure than Fagin the Jew. Fielding, the master, treated Wild with a curious cynicism that has made the thief-taker something of a mystery; and the stage-player has given him a patch on his eye and a scar on his cheek, and a mouth of such vast proportions that the historic investigator has had to come to Jonathan's rescue and give him a place no less distinguished than that of Louis XI., not to mention Fouché, or even Napoleon I. If, in this latter comparison, they have done Master Wild an injustice, it is open to his defenders to take the matter in hand.

Fact is in constant competition with fiction. There are persons who neither believe in Gulliver's Travels nor the story of Aladdin; and in our own day history and romance are in rivalry between Mendez and Fagin the Jew, Cartouche and Claude Du Val, Paul Jones and the redoubtable Captain Drake, Blueskin and Robert Macaire, Paul Clifford and Robin Hood, Captain Avery and Hans of Iceland. One might, indeed, follow up these comparisons until one had filled a catalogue as long as a Richardson novel. As for Jack, the very name has become a universal patronymic for all that is human, if not sublime. There are Jack the Giant-killer, dear to every youngster; Jack and the Beanstalk, a world-wide favourite; and Jack Tar, the life and soul of every port, the victor on every sea. Contemplating his place in future history and romance, shall not the present chronicler, called upon by wise editors to tell the story, pay homage to the lad who not only inspired Hogarth and provided him with a foil to his "Industrious Apprentice," but sat to his father-in-law, Sir James Thornhill, whose happy fate, according to the poetry of the period, it was to elevate the name and fame of Sheppard by order of the king?

"Apelles Alexander drew;
Cæsar is to Aurelius due;
Cromwell in Lilly's works doth shine,
And Sheppard, Thornhill, lives in thine."

But, as we were saying, when tradition caught us by the sleeve and demanded to be heard, Jack Sheppard's career of crime may be said to have begun with his escape from St. Giles's Roundhouse and his capture the same night at Hockley-in-the-Hole. The battle of Preston's Bear Garden made the owner's only "benefit" night more famous than all the mighty encounters of men and beasts that had been wont to draw great audiences thither, spite of the terrors and dangers of the road that is now a series of commonplace London thoroughfares. It sent Jack Sheppard, bruised and bleeding, to Newgate, and consigned Blueskin to a less rigorous prison, where his arm was set and his health considered; it made prisoner the beautiful Edgeworth Bess; it sent Eric Beryl to the murderous hold of Wild's Dutch sloop; but it left Mistress Cooke free to nurse the fire of a sudden passion for Eric that had been lighted by his innocence and her own pity for his helplessness. She had been able to follow him and his rough captors. In a fortunate moment she had induced Captain Avery to pilot her to Wild's sloop; and there, for a time, we must leave her, premising that it would be unjust altogether to blame Mistress Cooke for her desertion of the Pride of Hounslow Heath. Seeing that he was a prisoner, she could not be said to have deserted him; and love is a mystery of unfathomable depth.

It has been well said that romance is not in books, but in life; and even in the heart of the courtesan it is given to Cupid to make discovery of a corner sacred to the possibilities of a true love, however basely smothered with poisonous weeds. Whether it was for the good or

ill of Eric, it had been his lot to stir the hidden depths of this woman's nature. Like a will-o'-the-wisp, this sudden fascination led her into strange perils and disaster. Her course of love was beset with fire and sword, while Ellaline Wood trimmed her pure lamp of a maiden's devotion with a virgin passion. Whenever Ellaline thought of Jack as the associate of bad characters, it was to pity him and blame his unfortunate star. He lived in her heart and memory as the happy, cheerful lad of her father's house, his never-complaining but ill-used apprentice. She thought of him as the companion of stolen hours among the shavings and sawdust of her father's shop, he reading to her romances of the road, with an odd fairy tale thrown in, the story of Dick Whittington and the history of Bluebeard, the romance of Captain Macheath and Claude Du Val. Jack had delighted to tell and she to hear the story of Claude stopping the fine coach on the heath and inviting the great lady to dance a measure in the moonlight; and Ellaline had gladly contributed her mite for the purchase of some of those very books that Eric Beryl had scoffed at on the day when Jack had committed his first sin, not for himself, but for Eric.

Mr. Owen Wood, in these days of Ellaline's reminiscences, had realised his South Sea Stock and was living "retired," as Mrs. Wood had forecast, in a fine house at "Merrie Islington"; that was, however, anything but a merry house, except to Mistress Wood, who imagined for herself a kind of social paradise of which she was the presiding angel. She entertained the neighbouring gentry, such as would accept her hospitality, induced Wood to give "invites" to merchants of renown in the city, and continually lectured Ellaline and Wood on good manners and the usages of high society. She may have been the prototype of the famous Mrs. Malaprop, though

she did not possess the kindly nature nor the good heart of that remarkable lady, nor had she taken the waters at Tunbridge, let alone mimicked the gay ladies at Bath; but she had all the ambition of the proudest of them, with the manners of a cook and the vanity of a peacock, if indeed the bird with the bad voice is really conscious of its tail. Mrs. Wood's train, on high days and holidays, was no less gaudy and no less in the way, and she managed it as clumsily as the most feather-brained of peacocks, than which there is no more pitiful exhibition than Juno's bird strutting in the wet with a train draggling through the mud.

During the interval, between the battle of Hockley-in-the-Hole and the retirement of Mr. Owen Wood to the salubrious groves of Merry Islington, time had rollicked along with every character in this history, only pausing to be gentle and sympathetic with Ellaline. It had confirmed Sheppard in a nefarious disregard for both law and order; it had made her who was to be his lure his most attached and devoted partner, "in joy and in sorrow," as she had declared in a maudlin moment; in breaking Blueskin's arm, it had also broken his spirit and paled his nose, but the severities of an infirmary *régime* had at the same time restored his capacity for hot meats and strong waters, and he had once more taken service under Wild. The persistent Jonathan, having re-established his authority over his revolted subordinates (with the exception of Sheppard), was willing to forget the past in the development of his plans for the future; and so the machinery of the Old Bailey bureau once more moved easily, and villainy continued to prosper, as we shall see in the course of succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON BOARD THE "FAIRLIGHT"

ERIC BERYL had entirely disappeared from the ken of Wood and his companions. He had first been carried on board Wild's sloop, the "Fairlight." Sheppard, having easily traced him there, had made a desperate effort to accomplish his release, but Captain Grunstein, the Dutch skipper, had been a match for him. Jack, giving the lad up for lost, had made Master Wood acquainted with his place of captivity, and had thereupon gone about his own business, of earning what he called an adventurous living; for the young rogue had taken the cynical view of robbery, that it was with him a business, just as carpentering or any other trade might be. The knight of old went out with his sword and spear to seek adventures and plunder whomsoever he could. In these later days Jack and Blueskin, and the other knights of the road and the street, employed themselves in a similar fashion; but it was Jack's boast that he never took anything that was not useful to him. He did not rob for the mere sake of robbing, or make war upon another man's house for glory, as great kings and warriors had done; and he considered himself braver than they, for the reason that he fought his battles single-handed, his greatest being his escapes from durance, in spite of chains and bolts and in face of armed and numerous sentinels.

So, having done all he could in Beryl's interest, Jack returned to his work and his pleasures, and it must be said for the young scoundrel that he took his pleasures

anything but sadly. He was not even constant to Bess, though she had forgiven him heartily for an association with two of her rivals, not to be compared with her in any respect, either as to appearance or generosity; but they had assisted at his latest escape from Newgate, which was in this wise. It was on no ordinary charge that Sheppard was held. He was the victim of a professional friend and colleague, one Field. Jack had not only been charged and condemned for burglary, but was awaiting execution. Now, a little within the lodge at Newgate, there was, on the left hand, a hatch, defended and protected by large iron spikes. This opened on a dark passage that led up a few steps into the condemned hold. The prisoners were permitted to come down to this hatch to speak with their friends. Sheppard, being secretly provided with implements by one of his visitors (probably Blueskin, disguised as a countryman), found means to cut one of the spikes in such a manner that it would easily break off. In the evening, Catherine Keys and another woman of his acquaintance coming to see him, he broke off the spike, and thrusting his head and shoulders through the space, the women pulled him down, and so he made his escape undiscovered, though some of the keepers were at the time drinking at the further end of the lodge, as history records almost in these words.

While Jack was escaping from Newgate in the arms of Mistress Keys and her companion, Bess and Mistress Cooke, acting on the suggestions of Jack, were engaged in a second attempt to release Beryl. The lost heir had gone through many perils and privations. It had not answered the purpose of Wild to destroy him. He had come to the conclusion that there might be more money to be made out of Beryl and Wood than out of Sir Patrick Brent. Moreover, he had been unable to do all he had undertaken in his engagements with Brent. The

packet (Ferrish's detailed particulars Wild had been able to use in his contract with Brent) was still a missing link in the chain otherwise fairly complete. It might answer Wild's purpose better to instal Beryl himself and reap the reward of his enterprise, rather than rely upon the generosity or the necessities of Brent. Lady Waller's will had not been legally proven. Her lawyer had placed every possible obstacle in the way of Brent, and as there was plenty of money in the estate, the Court of Chancery was in no hurry to come to a decision. It only, however, needed the rightful heir to put in an appearance and be properly identified to at least enable him to enter Brentfield Hall and assume his rights and rank; this Brent could not prevent; and Lady Waller's will emphatically asserted the existence of her son, which Brent as emphatically denied upon a forged sworn deposition of Ferrish, which set forth that the child was accidentally drowned. Brent knew of this alleged deposition, and approved it; though Wild all the time had been accumulating and recording in his books evidence of the assassination of Sir Martin Waller by Sir Patrick Brent, which, together with certain documents that had come into his possession through a robbery in Essex, demonstrating Brent's intimate connection with conspiracies to restore James to the English throne, made Wild equal to either fortune, and Brent his victim whenever he might choose to take action against him, secret or public.

Therefore Eric Beryl was alive. He had, however, been removed from the sloop to Wild's private house immediately after Jack's attempt at rescue, but had afterwards been reconveyed to the "Fairlight," in which he had made a voyage to Amsterdam and back. On the night of the sailing, Mistress Cooke, disguised as a mariner and with the aid of a clever boatman from Greenwich, had crept aboard the sloop, professing that she was

hunted by the police, and offering Grunstein six nobles to take her on board, to which Grunstein had consented.

It was not many hours before Mistress Cooke succeeded in letting Eric know that he had a friend on board; but several days had elapsed before she was able to speak with him, and that only by a subterfuge, he was kept so close, Grunstein evidently for some reason or other fearing pursuit. She had plenty of money with her, and Grunstein was a grasping skipper, so she hoped before the voyage was over to make a bargain with him. The weather being squally, Grunstein was constantly on duty. There were only two other hands to work the vessel, and neither of them could speak English. Beside these, however, there was a cook, and Polly had won his good opinion. She had helped him in his work, and had accompanied him once or twice when he had taken Eric his food; but Eric had no suspicion, any more than the others, that she was anything than what she represented herself to be. She had told Grunstein that she had got into trouble through a sailor who had stolen a watch, that she had been mistaken for the thief, whereas she was an honest lad and on her way home after a voyage to the Indies, but she had deemed it safest to get aboard his sloop, being informed that he knew Jonathan Wild, who would no doubt help her, all the more that she knew the man who had stolen the watch and could give useful information to Wild; and Grunstein, with the youngster's gold in his pocket, was content. One afternoon, when they were nearing the Skelt, the sea being calm, and Grunstein, who had drunk hard the previous night, having gone to his cabin for a long nap, Mistress Cooke managed to induce the cook to let her have an interview with Eric, just for company's sake, and to cheer the lad. She at once disclosed herself to

Eric, and flung herself into his arms with a wild confession of her love for him.

Eric, with his equally intense devotion to Ellaline Wood, turned a deaf ear to her protestations.

"I will be your slave," said Polly, tears in her eyes, her voice trembling with emotion. "I love you. I can bribe this captain to let us go free when we arrive at Amsterdam; then we can seek a retreat far away from the reach of Jonathan Wild——"

"And far away from the girl to whom my heart and soul are pledged," Eric replied, with a cool indifference to the feelings of Mistress Cooke that, after the first shock of it, only made her the more ardent.

"You despise me," she said; "you think I am unworthy of you. God knows I am, but I will make myself worthy. Love conquers the world, they say; it shall conquer you. My people are respectable and well-to-do; they are honest folk in Essex, with a farm and stock, and a fair and true reputation. I was once as good a girl as ever lived, and had it not been for—— But, there, look at me; am I not good to look at? Even in these clothes? The moment I saw you I began to understand what love is, and though I tried to play the part of a loose woman at Hockley, your innocent eyes held me in check, your honest words went to my heart, and I loved you! I escaped by a miracle; I followed your captors; I was nearly drowned in attempting to get on board after you, to die with you, if need be, and——"

"Oh, my dear creature," said Eric, kissing her hand, "I have no words of rebuke for the life I thought you were leading. I am deeply touched by your kindness; it is more than I deserve, it is more than I can return, but I thank you from my heart——"

"Bill Horton claimed to be my husband," she said,

"and I am entitled to consider myself a widow. I never loved him, did not know what love was. I know now. And widows marry again, and some of them are happy. But oh! I don't ask you to marry me; I only ask to be with you, to help you, to share your captivity, to die for you, if need be; and if the worst comes to the worst, I'll lay my life down to release you, See!"

She drew from her breeches-pocket a knife, and from her coat a pistol; and, placing the knife in his hand, showed him a purse.

"With these," she said, "we might overcome the crew, and——"

"*Mein Gott!* might you!" exclaimed Grunstein, breaking in upon them, and seizing both weapons with a dexterity that belied his heavy and awkward appearance; and having thrust them into his belt, he took Mistress Cooke by the throat, on which she screamed a woman's scream, and he released her.

"*Mein Gott!* If dot vos not vot I vos thought—a voomans!—joust a voomans!"

"Don't harm her," said Eric. "She is only foolish, not wicked. Don't harm her."

"But, *mein Gott!* she vould harm me, mein frient," said Grunstein. "And she haf done you no goot, for I vos going to gif you some air on deck, and now I must a-make of you more ze prisoner dan ever vos."

Eric, with sunken eyes and cheeks, and more or less ragged as to his clothes, looked at the captain pitifully.

"I am not ze Gott-dam vellow you might tinks, and dot's vot I vos intend, I svear it."

"Then do it, sir, do it! Don't you see how pale and sick he is?" said Mistress Cooke, who now ventured to rise from the corner whither Grunstein had flung her.

"Vell, p'raps I vill. And I ain't zo particular as he

vos ; I takes a sveetheart ven von offers, and you can be mine, my tear ; vot you say?"

He approached her with a swaggering manner and a hideous leer.

"What do I say!" she exclaimed, as he approached her. "Touch me, and I will tear your eyes out!"

Eric, who had been chained while the vessel was near the shore off Greenhithe, had been freed as soon as they were at sea ; but he was weak from confinement and broken health. Nevertheless, he rose to his feet, and flung himself between the woman and the captain.

"Hello! Vot?" said Grunstein, "ze dog in ze manger ; you von't, and you von't let anoders? But dot's as it please me." And he seized Eric, who made but a poor resistance, though Mistress Cooke, flinging her arms round Grunstein, bore him to the floor and clutched him by the neck.

"*Mein Gott!*" said Grunstein, "vot a vixen! And you tinks to hold me, Nicker von Grunstein, a voomans and a boy? Ah, ah! ho, ho!"

He seized the woman's hands, tripped Eric with his foot, and was on his legs, scarcely ruffled.

"Come, mine tear, you must not be zo rough," he said, and kissed her in spite of her struggles.

"There, that will do!" said the woman, wiping her face. "Now let me go on deck, and we'll talk things over."

"Dot's ze vay to shpeak," said Grunstein ; "and it makes for ze goot of mine passenger, who does not loaf you, but vants fresh air, and he shall haf it. You joust be kind to me, and I vill be kind mit him."

They were nearing the Skelt, and Mistress Cooke looked at the water and wondered if she could swim to the shore ; or, if not, whether she could reach one of the several coasting vessels that were evidently making for the port to which the "Fairlight" was bound. First she

would see to what extent she would be able to manage Grunstein. She was ashamed now of her male attire. Contemplating her adventure, at the outset she had intended to carry a change of dress with her, but that might lead to her discovery, and she had money to purchase a new outfit on arriving either at Rotterdam or Amsterdam; so she had come on board with nothing more than she stood up in.

"You shall come on ze deck, master," said Grunstein; "but, mit zuch bloodt'irsty intentions, I must make you fast, vich I regrets, my desires being ze odervise, I assure you. But she make a vine sailor; and ven dey say a skipper half a vife in every port, it is a lie, but ven dey say he vould like von, it is true, and I am glad you vill haf nodings to do mit zis voomans."

"Sir," said Eric, "you are a sailor, and every sailor is a gentleman and respects a woman; a woman in trouble has a right to find a champion in every man that sails the sea."

"And a lover, eh, mine frient? A champion and a lover, vy not? Vot you say?"

"That if you do any further dishonour to that woman you are a scoundrel," Eric replied.

"*Mein Gott*, young man, am I not dot already? I am ze skipper vot sails Master Jonat'an Vild's sloop, vot deals nefarious, as dey say; nodings more dan a pirate, like Captain Avery, vot you meet at Hockley. Vot you say, den? Vy am I not to haf a vife, as vell as anoders?" With which remark he climbed the ladder and flung down the hatchway, and left Eric in the darkness.

"And now, *mein fräulein*, *meiner* sveetheart, come to mine cabin, and ve vill trinks to our better acqvaintance," said Grunstein, taking the woman by the arm, in a formal kind of manner that should not give away her disguise to the crew.

"With all my heart, captain," she said; "but excuse me for a minute, what vessel is that?"

"Ze schooner dot look like a tobb mit sails? Vell, dot is ze very craft I vos shpeaking of to mine passenger; it is the 'Mary Zhane,' vich is more dan suspected of ze crime of smuggling. But he manages vell, Master Avery; and ze Gofernment vink deir eye so long as he keep to ze North Sea."

"He is hailing you," she said; and she waved her handkerchief.

"Vot he hail me vor? He is a vrient of Master Jonat'an Vild; maybe he vould shpeak;" and he began to haul up his signal flags.

"What are you saying to him?"

"Vishing him goot vortune. He is bound vor Harvich, he say."

"Is that Captain Avery on the deck?"

"*Yah*, dot's Herr Avery; a pirate, zo dey say."

"How far is he off?"

"Vy? Is it dot you vould prefer him to a loafer better dan Captain Grunstein?"

The "Mary Jane" was still signalling.

"Do you mean to be my lover, really?"

"Dot is very mush vot I means."

Then Grunstein answered the "Mary Jane."

"What does he say?"

"He is von Gott-dam! I make nodings of vot he say."

"He is lowering a boat," said Mistress Cooke, who had already determined to seek the protection of Avery, rather than risk the hideous attentions of Grunstein.

"You shall go to mine cabin, my tear. If he send his boat, I vill haf no parleying mit you."

"Very well, my dear," said the woman; "but there's no hurry. Do you think I wouldn't sooner have you

for a friend than Avery, with all those ringlets on his beard?"

"Ah, my loaf, does ze vind set in dot qvarter? Den it shall be as you vish; only I vill not vait for dot dam' boat!" which had already put off for the "Fairlight." He gave orders to press on sail, and signalled his intention to the "Mary Jane," which signalled back; whereupon Grunstein, muttering curses, went to the stern of the boat to speak with the helmsman.

He had no sooner turned his back upon Mistress Cooke than she whipped off her shoes and sprang overboard, striking out with a dashing stroke for the boat of the "Mary Jane."

CHAPTER XIX

EDGEWORTH BESS AND MISTRESS COOKE IN WILD'S STONE-PARLOUR

SHEPPARD was the most unruly of Wild's band, frequently entering upon enterprises of his own invention, in the which he had been aided and abetted by Blueskin. The latter was, nevertheless, at the beck and call of Wild, and might be relied upon to fulfil his engagements. With Sheppard it was a question of mood. Moreover, Jack was under the impression that he was his own master, and he did not find Wild's rewards sufficient to satisfy the demands of Edgeworth Bess, whom he called his wife, and no man could have had a more fantastic or extravagant mistress. Her rooms, near Leicester Fields, were invariably cosy and well-ordered; though now and then she and Jack had to go into queer places of hiding, both from Wild and the regular police. The City Marshal,

for example, while he was in league with Wild and very much under his thumb, also maintained a certain independent course of action, both robbing and taking thieves on his own account. He redeemed his somewhat shady reputation every now and then in the estimation of the authorities by a skilful capture and a successful prosecution. In this he was materially aided by Wild, who, in his acts of vengeance and murderous intrigues, found the Marshal a most convenient instrument. It was easier for Wild to get a man into Newgate than to release him, though he had an ever-changing company of professional witnesses, both to aid a prosecution or assist at a defence. Oddly enough, he had never once used his influence to secure the release of Jack Sheppard, and he had only once procured his incarceration, and that was after the Hockley revolt. He had, however, on one occasion locked him up in his own private prison, but had been unable to hold him. Quilt Arnold going to him with a message from his captor, Jack had, in some strange way, unscrewed an iron bolt that was supposed to control his actions, and, on Quilt's appearance, crept between his legs, overthrew him, hit him on the head, stunned him, tore off his coat and vest, and, stretching himself to his full height, had walked out as Quilt and deceived the jailers. Quilt owed him a grudge for this trick; but Wild had condoned it, out of admiration for its daring. Sheppard was altogether too reckless to keep out of gaol, and his life was a round of either being on the eve of arrest or on the eve of escape.

The man who had divided town and country into districts and divisions, appointing distinct gangs of robbers for each, and who had light-fingered representatives to attend Court ceremonials, birthday celebrations, and the precincts and lobbies of both Houses of Parliament, and who, by means of a diplomatic ingenuity that practically

gave him the power of life and death among his vast army of bandits, may easily be credited with the mysterious establishment in the Old Bailey that constituted his headquarters. The robbers of the Rhine were very commonplace marauders compared with Jonathan Wild, into whose methods entered all the arts of the diplomat and the soldier; and none of them had, probably, more secret dungeons in their lordly fortresses than the chief of the robbers of London, a little over a hundred and fifty years ago, in the very heart of the British metropolis.

Among the most grim of the grim apartments in Wild's Old Bailey establishment was the one he called the stone-parlour. A vaulted chamber, it was at the same time the ante-room to his prison cells and the subway to his private entrance to Newgate. It was not until many years after the events we are chronicling that this subterranean passage was discovered, and it was not difficult to understand with what advantage it must have been used by the arch malefactor. At the same time, curiously enough, he had kept the way inviolate from the foot of the escaping convict. The passage was made that he might be in secret communication with Newgate, though he was always freely admitted, and had access to prisoners without let or hindrance. But he loved mystery and secret power and surprises of his own. It pleased him to make sudden appearances in the great prison without having entered from the main doorway. There was only one official in Newgate who had knowledge of the secret, and he was one of Wild's most devoted creatures, well paid and well considered; for, though Wild was mean and parsimonious to those who were entirely in his power, he was liberal where liberality was either necessary or desirable.

The stone-parlour was grotesquely furnished. Entered by a descent of well-worn steps, there faced you a strong barred door that led to several dungeons, and to the nar-

row subway. In the centre of the room stood a heavy oak table, flanked by two ponderous oak chairs. Beneath the table was a dollar-chest of iron, curiously wrought. In a corner of the room loomed forth a figure in armour, so life-like that the hard sculptured face might have been that of a living sentinel. A single picture adorned the walls. It was the realistic painting of a gibbet, with a man hung in chains, the work of a great master.

On an autumn day, a year or more after the first arrest of Sheppard, Master Quilt conducted to the stone-parlour Mistress Edgeworth Bess and her friend, Mistress Polly Cooke. They were evidently not willing visitors.

"Where are you a-bringing us to, Master Jackal?" asked Edgeworth Bess, her companion clinging to her with undisguised apprehension.

"This is one of Master Wild's very private rooms; it is called the stone-parlour. The door you are looking at is Master Wild's private way to Newgate; and it also leads to his own private prison cells."

"Oh, indeed!" said Bess, with an assumption of courage.

"And that picture, which Mistress Cooke is looking at——"

"Shivering at, you should say," replied Bess; "it's enough to chill a saint in heaven."

"Not to speak of saints that ain't in heaven," said Poll, trying to be as bold as Bess.

"Poll, you're coming round," said Bess.

"That picture is what Master Wild calls 'The Rebuke to Human Vanity,'" said Quilt. "It is a portrait that never came to pass, as one may say. It was intended for an enemy, but he died in his bed, honest; and it represents, Master Wild declares, his one failure in life; he said the man should hang at Tyburn."

"And if Captain Sheppard's good angel, Edgeworth

Bess, and the gentle Lady Cooke wish Master Wild to have a second failure in that direction, they will both deal squarely with him," added Wild himself.

The woman started at his appearance. It seemed as if he had come through the floor; but he had only entered through a panel, beneath the gibbet picture—a panel that looked like an enormous block of stone, but was simply an oak panel, painted to imitate the granite-like walls of the other parts of the room.

"We ain't much in the way of angels, Master Wild, Poll and me, but the angels that is angels is on the side of my Jack; he's escaped from prison every time the devils have put him there."

"But the devils catch him again," said Wild, with a chuckle, as he tapped his snuff-box and refreshed himself; "and the ungrateful scamp won't let me play the good angel to him."

"You're a nice figure for a good angel, ain't you?" said Bess.

"Yes, ain't you?" repeated Mistress Cooke, timidly, as he seemed to look towards her for an opinion.

"I can quite see myself in that character," he said, "with a pair of seraphic wings. Master Quilt, you are showing the ladies some of the secrets of the Old Bailey; unbar our little half-way house to Tyburn."

Quilt unbarred the iron door, and as it swung somewhat ponderously upon its hinges, two black-muzzled and masked men, in a kind of official-looking costume, close-fitting hats, black jerkins with tight-fitting sleeves and gauntlets, each having a broad belt with a dirk or long sheathed knife, stood on each side of the dark portal.

"Oh!" both women exclaimed; and Mistress Cooke once more clung to her companion. As Wild contemplated them, he approved of their beauty—the one robust,

blonde, and with rare blue eyes; the other dark, pale, and of a graceful figure.

"Oh, Master Wild, we've seen enough!" exclaimed Bess.

"Yes, please, Master Wild," added the more timid of the two.

Bess, dragging her clinging companion a few paces, made for the steps by which they had descended into the stone-parlour; whereupon Wild, catching Bess by the wrist, held her as in a vice. At the same time he signalled the two guards or jailers to retire, and Quilt barred the door, that seemed to awaken infinite echoes as it clanged upon the dark passage-way.

"Unless you answer me truly, you will lodge there—until—well, until you are forgotten."

Bess and Poll stood close together as he spoke.

"That you may not ply me with needless lies, I will show you a few of my cards. You, Mistress Cooke, are a clever, daring minx; but while your insubordination deserves punishment, it compels my admiration."

He took snuff, and smiled as he brushed the dust from the lapel of his coat. Mistress Cooke looked at him timidly.

"Yes, very well acted; but true courage is ever modest, and true love self-sacrificing."

Wild's treatment of her companion puzzled Edgeworth Bess, and she glanced inquiringly at Mistress Cooke, who had made no confession of her escapade on Grunstein's sloop; and Avery had kept her secret; he kept most things. Mistress Cooke had parted with her last mark on board the "Mary Jane," and had even permitted herself to be entertained with the ship's song. Though the fact belongs to a succeeding chapter, it is well at this point to let the reader know what Wild had only recently discovered. It only has to be added that

she was taken on board the "Mary Jane," well treated, landed at Harwich, and that she had kept the story to herself; Bess premising that she had been away on some expedition of affection or adventure that required no explanation.

"You, then," said Wild, addressing Bess, "had no hand in Mistress Cooke's single attempt on the love of Beryl and the life of Grunstein?"

"Yet what I don't know is hardly worth knowing," said Bess, evasively.

"Women are naturally vain, my dear," said Wild, "and some are born to be heroines. I'll back Mistress Cooke for the double title of heroine and countess against your own fair prospects."

"I dare say Polly is grateful, but when she knows as much of you as I do, she will understand how devilish you are at heart when you begin to pay compliments; the cat and the mouse."

"Poll knows better," Wild replied. "Poll has wit as well as beauty, and deserves to make a great marriage."

"Bill Horton will be glad to hear that when he makes his bow at Tyburn," said Bess, with a derisive laugh.

Poll shivered, and bent her eyes on the ground.

"Bill Horton!" said Wild, chuckling, and rubbing his chin, a habit with him when perplexed or amused. "Bill Horton; we look higher than that, eh, Polly?"

"As high as the chaplain will tell Horton to look?" said Bess, beginning to regard the dungeon as a mere passing threat; an idea immediately dissipated by a sudden change in Wild's manner.

"A truce to trifling and compliments," said Wild, having satisfied himself of the truth of a confession that had been made to him by Grunstein. "Listen to me, hussies both! You are, each of you, concerned in the latest attempt to thwart me and my plans. You both

got on board my sloop, the 'Fairlight,' now off Greenwich, three days since; and on the day following its one passenger disappeared. Where is the young villain who calls himself Eric Beryl? So help me heaven, if you palter with me, or lie or obstruct me in his recapture, you are doomed."

It was now Bess's turn to tremble. Mistress Cooke faced Wild fearlessly, Eric's safety being in question.

"Answer me," said Wild.

"We don't know where he is, but we hope we have put him beyond your cruel reach," said Poll.

"Poll!" exclaimed Bess.

"My cruel reach! By Tyburn tree, you shall know how cruel it can be, if——"

"My dear soul, it's no good fighting Master Wild; no man has been able to do it yet, let alone a woman," said Bess, trying to restrain her companion.

"I do not fear him."

"Yes, you do," said Wild.

"No more than I fear death!" the woman replied, her dark eyes flashing defiance.

"But I fear both," said Bess, "and I'll tell you where Master Beryl may be found—either at the 'Cross Shovels' or the 'Black Lion.'"

"So help you?"

"So deal with me as I with you!" said Bess, pale to the lips.

"What say you, Mistress Cooke, alias Horton, alias——"

"Silence, coward!" she exclaimed. "You think it is sport to insult a woman. Perhaps that comes from the sort of creature your mother was."

"Ribald!" said Wild. "I never had a mother."

"The whole race of womanhood should be thankful for such a confession. You came of the mangrove that

grows by the gibbet; and the gibbet will have you back again at last."

Quilt listened, and looked on with a calm, unmoved countenance; but his heart went out to Mistress Cooke.

"You prophesy, do you?" said Wild, with a malicious grin. "I only prophesy when I know, and I leave to you the misery of doubting and fearing what your end may be. To begin with, you are my prisoner. To prove your words, Mistress Edgeworth Bess, and that Mistress Cooke may be informed of the immediate fate of her newest fancy, Master Quilt will send messengers to the 'Black Lion,' the 'Cross Shovels,' and elsewhere, until we find him."

Quilt moved silently to the barred door.

"Master Wild," said Mistress Cooke, "one word——"

"Wait," said Wild, addressing Quilt. "Mistress Cooke desires to address the court;" and he assumed a deferential and attentive attitude.

"There is a court above, Master Wild, before whose bar you will one day have to appear."

"You too, my dear," said Wild, scoffingly.

"And may God have mercy on me! And He will, for I am repentant, and am atoning," replied the woman, crossing herself with a strange solemnity.

"One world at a time, Mistress Cooke; this present one is good enough for me."

"And bad enough, sir!" said the woman. "The word I have to say is an appeal. Yonder young man, whom you are hounding to death, has done you no wrong, nor have I; but I will give you my life for his. If that be too mean a sacrifice, let me work out his liberty; let me be of service to him and to you. But oh, sir, spare him! spare him!"

She stretched her arms towards him, and the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Fool!" said Wild, savagely. "What does the idiot mean? Spare him! Every minute he is in my custody I am sparing him, saving him from death."

"You?" said the woman. "Every minute in your custody has been to him a living death!"

"Who says so?"

"You'll be the death of us," said Bess, in a hoarse whisper, for she understood the devilish curl of Wild's cruel lip.

"Master Beryl shall answer you," said Wild. "Until then——"

Again Quilt unbarred the door; the masked jailers reappeared.

"Oh, Master Wild, don't lock us up!" screamed Bess, now entirely overcome, an unusual sight both for Wild and Quilt. "Oh, dear Master Wild!" her imagination conjuring up every possible horror that might await them in that dark abyss.

Mistress Cooke held her companion's hand, but made no sign of fear.

"For God's sake!" urged Bess. "Oh, Master Quilt, help us!"

"He shall, my child, he shall," said Wild. "You will be well treated; food of the best, beds of the softest, wine of the choicest—captivity made as pleasant as Quilt can make it; eh, Quilt?"

"Yes, Master Wild, most assuredly," Quilt replied.

The next moment they were seized by the grim jailers, gagged, and thrust into the darkness, the ponderous door closing upon them with a clang that awakened distant and mysterious echoes.

CHAPTER XX

RECALLS QUILT'S CURIOUS EXCLAMATION, "RATS!"

"THOSE rascally ballad-makers were right," said Jonathan, dragging a chair from the table and seating himself in front of Quilt; "they were right, Quilt, when they depicted Fortune as a woman. The jade! she's played me damnably false of late. The only joy in life is to outmatch her at her own game. The young man Beryl has escaped from the Dutchman's sloop."

"Escaped!" said Quilt.

"It was a mistake to let Bess see Jack in prison. He put her up to this latest scheme. It is like the young imp. That fool, Polly Cooke, is in love with the youngster Beryl. Bess and she are chums; though Cooke, damme, is as prudish as a raw wench of sixteen. Did Grunstein tell you of the second attempt to rescue Beryl?"

"No, sir," Quilt replied; though he knew all about it, having overheard the Dutchman relate the entire story to Wild.

"A woman dressed as a sailor. By Venus, and a bold act of love! Grunstein did not know the fellow! How should he? The fellow was Mistress Cooke. Pretended to be pursued, got on board, sailed with him, claimed acquaintance with me, gradually wormed her way into the friendship of one of Grunstein's men, got into the hold with the lad, confessed her love for him, handed him a knife, drew a pistol, wanted to murder the captain and the devil knows what; and when she could do no more, jumped into the sea and swam off to the 'Mary

Jane' and that damned curly-bearded fool Avery, and so got to Harwich and thence to London, to start fresh enterprises and schemes—not, mind you, out of enmity to me, but out of love for this youngster. 'The third time pays for all,' says the proverb. The latest development is that she and Bess got on board the sloop the day after her arrival in port; put up to the idea, no doubt, by Sheppard, and provided with funds by Wood: he found the money, Bess and Polly found the charms. Old Grunstein, the lubberhead—who has only the one fault of being such a devilish gay dog—blows like a porpoise and loves like a pig, falls a victim to beauty and bribery—curse him—and has the confounded impudence to come and confess the entire business, and ask me to hang him. A fat Don Juan, in that Dutch kind of petticoat they affect, a pair of mighty boots, and a face as broad as the beam of a Dutch wherry. He made me laugh in spite of my anger; and by the sacred tree of Tyburn, I had a mind to hit him over the head with the butt of my pistol!"

"You amaze me, Master Wild."

"Damme, but Grunstein amazed me."

"As for Mistress Cooke, I thought Master Horton had claims upon her."

"Best let him loose, eh? He'll clip her wings," said Wild; adding, "Where is he?" as if he did not know, and had not, indeed, secured his arrest and his removal from one roundhouse to another, and his final committal to Newgate. It pleased Jonathan to pretend in this way, and Quilt always humoured him. "Remind me of Horton in the morning. Is he charged?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"The highway robbery at Finchley, which you ordered Fennel to swear against him."

"Yes, I remember. I will see Fennel in the morning. But the escape of Beryl is a more serious business, Quilt. I wish Sheppard were free."

"Do you, sir?"

"Yes."

"Yet you made short work of him in this last case, sir."

"When he and Blueskin thought they could not only defy me but set up their own warehouses, it was time to make short work with them."

"The villain Field betrayed Sheppard to you, and you will doubtless repay him, since you wish Sheppard free. You never trust the man who betrays another, Master Wild."

"Never, Quilt. This Field is a proper scoundrel, though. Worms into the confidence of Blake and Sheppard; waits until their warehouse is well stocked, breaks in at night, and moves their property; hires a waggon, sir, to do it; and then peaches on both Sheppard and Blake. A proper scoundrel! One day we'll hang him, Quilt."

"And richly he deserves his fate," said Quilt.

"You despise a traitor, Quilt?"

"I do, sir," Quilt replied, looking Wild steadily in the face.

"You are the only man I ever trusted. You were true at first from fear. You are true now, Quilt, because you like the work, and me, eh, Quilt?"

"I do, Master Wild, I do. There are those who would condemn us both, sir; but, as you have made me feel on several occasions when you have honoured me with your confidence and opinions upon ethical morality and the like, life is a battle; some fight it one way, some another. The campaigns of the great soldiers are only robberies conducted on a large scale, their sieges burglaries; they work

for the chiefs and governments at home; and if we come to politics, it is no more a crime to pick a lock than to unhinge a constitution."

"Just so," said Wild, who was scrutinising Quilt searchingly, as his confidant addressed him very much in his own words.

"You know this house from roof to cellar?"

"Yes, sir; I have mastered every nook and corner of it, by your orders."

"In case one day we might have to stand a siege ourselves. Kings and governments have their ups and downs and tribulations; then why not we? So 'tis well we are discreet. Do you recall the death of Ferrish?"

"Distinctly," said Quilt.

"You have still no theory touching the disappearance of that packet of papers, which he described so minutely and which I saw so distinctly?"

"None, Master Wild."

"You once said 'Rats!'"

"I but echoed a suggestion of your own, sir," Quilt replied; and Wild took snuff thoughtfully.

"There was a man locked up in the adjoining cell?"

"Yes."

"Did it not occur to you that there might have been some means of communication between the two apartments—a panel, a trap-door, perhaps?"

"You asked me the same question the next day, if you remember; and I thoroughly examined every board and panel."

"Yes, I do remember," said Wild, now shifting his position, having noted every expression that had passed over Quilt's countenance. "What brought us into this discussion?"

"You were thinking of Jack Sheppard."

"I want him."

"You easily proved an alibi for Joseph Blake."

"Blake is only a fool. Sheppard is a knave. The evidence against him was strong and voluminous. Since his last escape they hold him tight. I must do without him. Harking back to that lost packet of Ferrish's, the other papers he sold to Wood and Wood's own private documents relating to Beryl and the Brent and Waller properties were removed from the bank yesterday. They were in the strong box as a deposit for safety. If I had those papers I might possibly make another deal, if not with Sir Patrick Brent, with Wood himself, or even with the lad Beryl. The missing link is the Ferrish packet. I would give a thousand pounds for that little parcel."

"It is strange, with all your knowledge and power, Master Wild, that this packet still eludes you."

"And you, Quilt, and you? Don't forget that you are deeply concerned. The Brent business concluded successfully makes you a free man and rich. I have always said so."

"A free man!" said Quilt. "But am I not a free man?"

"So long as I live, Quilt, and remain your friend."

"And so long as you live you will be my friend," said Quilt, "for I shall ever deserve your protection. One day, in your generosity, you will restore to me the documents and warrant you hold against me."

"When we handle the remainder of the Brent money, Quilt. Though, as you know, my pride is engaged more than my pocket in this business. You doubt it? I see you do by your face."

"Master Wild!" said Quilt.

"Every man turns against me when it suits his purpose."

"How long must I serve you to ensure your perfect confidence?"

"You have my perfect confidence. If you have not, who has? You are my second self, man—in some things."

"Then why not make me perfectly happy, Master Wild, by taking from my hands and feet the chains that, metaphorically speaking, hold me, and remove the shadow of the gallows that hangs over me?"

"All in good time, Quilt. I trust you. Do you trust me. It is only for a little while—if we are fortunate in the enterprise we have both so much at heart. Rot me, Quilt, if I find myself thinking of anything else just now! See, then, how I trust you. I sleep well, knowing that the great machine of the Old Bailey, the bank and counting-house and ateliers of Jonathan Wild are in good hands, faithful subordinates under a watchful chief, faithful because it is their interest to be true."

"And with a stream of gold for ever flowing into your coffers and your banks," said Quilt.

"And shall flow into yours too, Quilt. Be patient. . . . By the way, has the City Marshal arrived?"

"Yes, sir; he is in your room, reading the attack upon him in the latest pamphlet, in which he is charged with conniving at crime and sharing the plunder of thieves. He is foaming at the mouth over it."

"He shall foam blood before I've done with him," Wild answered. "How soon do you expect Blueskin?"

"Almost immediately."

A loud knocking at the door above, and then a hurrying of feet, startled both Quilt and Wild.

"What is it?" said Wild.

Quilt hurried to the steps; to meet Wallett, Isaacs, and another, with Jack Sheppard, partly ironed.

As they entered they flung Jack forward. He fell, staggering, into the arms of Wild, who smiled, as he said to himself, "The gods are propitious."

"Escaped from Newgate," said Wallett. "Took refuge in a barn by St. Giles's; tryin' to get his irons off; we was passin' on other business, chanced to see him, took him, and brought him here."

"Well done, and briefly described. Good fellows. Master Quilt will remember your service in your stipends; and here's a guinea to drink the king's health."

"Which king, your honour?" asked Isaacs. "Not the king over the water? I says King Wild, that's what I says!"

"Oh, you're fool enough for anything, Isaacs; so here's another guinea for you."

"Your gracious honour," said Isaacs.

"That will do," Wild replied; and Quilt conducted them forth.

"The first two guineas you ever gave away in your life, I should think, Master Wild," said Jack.

"Yet I bought you with three," said Wild, tapping his snuff-box, "three, and a compliment."

"It was a devilish good investment for you," said Jack.

"And I would have given two hundred for you just now, my friend," said Wild, not heeding Jack's reply. "I want you."

"To make a companion picture of me to that?" said Jack, pointing to the gibbet on the wall.

"That's for Despair, Captain," said Wild, in the blandest tone he could assume, "the skeleton in the closet of the aged; for Youth, this other."

He touched the frame of the picture, and another glided slowly across it, eclipsing the gibbet with the nude figure of a beautiful woman.

"I was young once, and have my memories; and this was painted by the king's painter, Sir James Thornhill. He calls it 'Pleasure.'"

"You are a wonderful man, Master Wild."

"No less renowned than Captain Sheppard," Wild replied. Then, looking down at the irons that were fastened with string about Jack's waist,—the lad had freed his ankles but failed to get rid of the manacles altogether, —"Remove his irons, Quilt."

Quilt, taking a hammer and chisel from the chest beneath the table, struck off the irons.

"When we have concluded the little business I have to mention to you, Quilt will introduce you to a dinner worthy of the prince of cracksmen."

"Thank you, Master Wild; your servant, sir," Jack replied, stretching himself and pacing the room to get back the comfortable use of his limbs. "What's the game, sir?—burglary or murder? Murder's not much in my line."

"At a pinch, eh?"

"Well, it depends," said Jack, laughing, and impudently, without invitation, helping himself to snuff from Wild's box; "if it were Master Quilt, now?"

"Poor Quilt!" said Wild; "the most inoffensive of cut-throats."

"Innocence itself," said Quilt, with as near an approach to a smile as he ever permitted himself.

"But a truce to badinage, Master Sheppard. I am expecting a friend of yours," said Wild.

"The governor of Newgate?" inquired Jack, laughing, "or Jack Ketch?"

"Neither, my lad; but Blueskin."

At which moment there was a signal; three knocks on the outer door.

"And here he is, sir," said Quilt.

"Come in, Master Blake," said Wild, "come in. A comrade has called from Newgate, and wants to see you."

Blueskin entered cautiously. He was not accustomed

to raillery from Wild, unless it was to veil cynicism or cruelty.

"Blueskin!" exclaimed Jack, with a real sound of delight in his voice. "Dear old Blue! Are you glad to see me?"

"I b'lieve you, my boy," said Blueskin.

CHAPTER XXI

BLUESKIN OBJECTS TO WILD'S PARABLES

"Now, this is the business concerning which I requested you to see me. The splendid skill and courage of Captain Sheppard make the scheme a certainty. When a man is determined upon a thing he sometimes forces the hand of Fate, as I do now."

"You likes to speak in parables, Master Wild," said Blueskin.

"And you are always appreciative, Master Blake. . . . To-morrow night, you and Jack crack me The Cedars, at Islington."

"What, Wood's place?" said Jack. "Not me, Master Wild!"

"Oh, yes, you will," said Wild. "Wood is rich enough now, you know; snatched his cargo of pearls from the South Sea."

"Let him keep his cargo," said Jack.

"He was never a friend of yours," Wild answered.

"But Captain Sheppard respects Master Wood's daughter," said Blueskin.

"And has made a much livelier choice," said Wild, rubbing his chin, as he thought of Bess and Mistress Cooke behind the barred door.

"Of course he has; that's what I tell him," said Blueskin.

"You value the life and liberty of Eric Beryl?"

"Above my own; you know that right well," Jack replied.

"And you hate to be one of my little army of heroes?"

"On the contrary," Blueskin chimed in, and nudged Jack significantly.

"Yet he is continually in revolt; does business on his own account," said Wild.

"Which he regrets, as I do, and which you forgives honourably," Blueskin answered; "and my friend, Captain Sheppard, is proud of your confidence."

"Master Wild's confidence is all on one side," said Jack; "and so's his money."

"But I keep my word," said Wild. "I tell you I'll put you in Newgate, and I do it."

"You do," said Blueskin.

"I say I'll release you, and you are free."

"You are the soul of honour, Master Wild," said Blueskin.

"Not in my case; whenever did you release me, Master Wild?" asked Jack.

"No need for any man to intervene between you and the mightiest of locks and bars," Wild answered, with a bow such as might have been inspired by the most noted of heroes.

"True, so far," said Jack, "and I thank you for remembering it. Honour to whom honour's due, Master Wild, but damme if I owe you anything!"

"Jack, my lad, Jack," said Blueskin, "don't let us forget our manners."

"Nor your interests," said Wild. "I like a man to wave his own flag and to blow his own trumpet, on occa-

sion; but gratitude is a great matter too, Master Blake. Now, listen; I am of a forgiving nature."

"You are! you are!" said Blueskin, with a side-wink at Jack.

"Listen," said Wild, seating himself at the table in a judicial attitude. "Mr. Owen Wood has recently removed from the bank a packet of scrip. It is worth five hundred pounds to him; two thousand to me. It contains the signature of a Jacobite general, and proves a case of bribery in which Master Wood has no interest whatever. I want that packet. It is in a strong box, behind a cabinet near the mantelpiece in Wood's best parlour. The strong box is let into the wall; but the key of it is in a secret drawer in the bureau—one of those secret drawers that are made in every bureau of the kind, a side drawer that opens with a spring at the top."

"Yes," said Blueskin, nodding.

"He bought that cabinet through an agent of mine. I will give you a plan of it; and in case you do not find the key of the iron box behind the bureau, Captain Sheppard will carry his collection of skeletons. Quilt has them, with other tools of our expert locksmith."

He bowed again to Jack, half rising in his seat to do so, which tickled Jack's vanity.

"There is also some treasure of gold and bills of exchange; and only lately, to please his beloved wife, Wood has purchased ancestral plate, including a service that has been through our hands, Master Blake."

"And what might be the crest, Master Wild?"

"It was that of the Dymokes," said Wild; "and has been prettily replaced with a brand new design for Wood, his very ancient arms quartered thereon, with the crest of Madame Wood's father, who was a tinker or something of the kind.

"An officer in his Majesty's service," said Jack.

"Indeed! Most likely. His crest is a dolphin, now I remember, sitting defiantly on a harpoon," said Wild, with a chuckle. "No matter. As I said before, Master Wood is wealthy; we take no toll of the poor. You crack me The Cedars; my share, that packet I tell you of; yours the plate, gold, bills, and whatever else you can carry away."

"I'll have no hand in it," said Jack.

"When the packet is in my possession, and you have shared the plunder—no inconsiderable booty—Master Sheppard is at liberty to forswear my society and surveillance for ever. . . . We will celebrate his withdrawal from my merry band of freebooters over a bottle of the best in my cellars; and you would be astonished what some of my vaults contain."

He flourished his snuff-box and chuckled. Jack took a pinch, and handed the box to Blueskin. Wild chuckled to think of Bess and Mistress Cooke fretting below. Jack looked wistfully at him, as he thought of Eric and the imprisonment he had endured in those same vaults. Blueskin watched Wild and Jack, wondered which of them would be the first to come to grief. Under Blueskin's rough and reckless manner there was a shrewd habit of thought, and in the band of Robin Hood, or as a free lance in the boasted days of chivalry, he would have been reckoned a fellow of infinite jest and honesty. Different times, different manners. His lot was cast in an age when, in spite of an epidemic of chicanery in high places and intrigues of conspirators and a general looseness of conduct in nearly every class of society, he was but a villain of the lowest type, a thief, and, at a pinch, one who would not have hesitated at murder; though, in the fiercest history of his crimes, assassination was never laid to his charge.

"I have been told," said Jack, "that you have regis-

tered an oath in heaven, or in the place you are most likely to be acquainted with, to hang me."

"One registers oaths with reservations, Master Sheppard," Wild replied.

"Body o' me!" exclaimed Blueskin, "let's have no words about the business. As for hanging, like kissing, it goes by favour; if we all had our deserts, why, Master Wild would not be livin' on the fat o' the land and a-hinvitin' of us to join him; but what of that? We each fulfils our destiny."

"Well and wittily put," said Wild. "Now, Master Sheppard, your answer?"

"You've had it; I'll have no hand in it."

"Yes, you will," said Wild, sharply. "Quilt will provide you with horses, saddle-bags, and complete equipments. Time, weather, everything favours you. Master Sheppard, in the hands of a generous Fate, has slipped his irons that he might take charge of the expedition. Don't turn away, Sheppard, my boy. You are going to thank me for the job. . . . In addition to the plunder, I give you my word that Eric Beryl shall be free within four and twenty hours."

"Unharmed and at liberty?" said Jack.

"Unharmed and at liberty," said Wild, impressively repeating Jack's condition; "and furthermore, free, and invited to command my aid in recovering his name, title, and estates."

"You do, then, admit that his claim is true?" asked Jack. "And you are willing to throw over Sir Patrick Brent?"

"The lieutenant must not cross-examine or question his superior beyond the immediate and current movements of his army."

"You only give us half your confidence."

"Do you give me as much of yours?" asked Wild,

making a shrewd guess at Jack's knowledge of the attempt to release Eric; the result of which, fortunately for Wild, Jack could not have known, Bess having had no opportunity of visiting him, and Blueskin having been engaged in business that also kept him apart from both Bess and Mistress Cooke.

"When you ask it on equal terms."

"I would have asked it if I had known what you had said to Edgeworth Bess on her last visit to you in Newgate."

"What I said?"

"It was a clever scheme. Bess has a merry eye. Old Grunstein is a libidinous sea-dog," said Wild, rubbing his chin.

Blueskin looked puzzled, and remarked that Master Wild did certainly love parables.

"Well, Captain Sheppard, it did not work. Grunstein was willing, the faithless scoundrel; but Quilt is a ferret, and Abrahams and Isaacs are not such fools as they appear to be; which means that the 'Fairlight' is ready to sail, and with a full complement of passengers."

"Which means only one?" said Jack.

"Just one, and no more," Wild replied. "I have countermanded sailing orders and increased the guard on board. Now, Master Sheppard, the life and freedom of Eric Beryl are in your hands. That little packet of scrip in mine, the plunder in yours and Blake's, a free offering from me to further cement our friendly alliance, Eric Beryl is free, and I will help him to defeat the machinations of his bloodthirsty relative and usurper, Sir Patrick Brent."

"On your oath?"

"On my soul and honour as a gentleman!"

"It's a bargain," said Jack, "eh, Blueskin, old fellow?"

"I believe you, my boy!" said Jack's admiring companion.

"Very well," said Wild. "You will find a little dinner ready upstairs, with a bottle that will set you dreaming of paradise; sacrilege to smoke with it, Master Blake, but you will find some rare Virginia to put in your pipe with the grog that follows."

"You are a prince, Master Wild," said Blueskin.

"Master Quilt, show my friends to the blue-room."

"This way, gentlemen," said Quilt, taking his leave with ceremony; Blueskin and Jack bowing to Wild, and following Quilt with something akin to hearty laughter.

Wild stood and listened, with a curious smile, and rubbed his chin, as they went up the steps, Blueskin commenting on the paradise in store for them—"Wine that'll make your hair curl, my boy. Body o' me, but Wild's is a great service, after all!"

CHAPTER XXII

ILLUSTRATES THE FALLACY OF THE PROVERB THAT THERE IS "HONOUR AMONG THIEVES"

"I DOUBT if Master Hichen, the City Marshal, will think so," said Wild, as he closed the door and contemplated the panel that separated the vaulted chamber from a smaller and still more private room. He evidently expected a visitor. "But we shall see. I'll fire his greed, and use him to-morrow night as the monkey uses the cat's paw in the fable. And Master Sheppard, I think I have a little surprise for you. . . . Who was it said, 'The world's mine oyster,' which he would open with his sword? Great generals command other swords,

and keep their own bright and unpolluted. The monkey in the fable had the right view of it, and the showman demonstrates it, pulling the strings of puppets that dance to any tune he sets. And yet there are times when a gentleman must draw ; and we have had our affairs, old friend."

He drew his sword, and tested it ; bending it upon the floor, and letting the blade fly forth as he made imaginary passes into the body of an imaginary foe.

Two knocks upon the panel made him sheathe his weapon. He responded to the signal, rapping thrice with a ring that he wore upon his forefinger. When he was in a more than usually gruesome, or, as he called it, lovable mood, he would tell his wife that there was poison in the ring, a subtle fluid, of which a mere pin's-point of a drop would kill in a few seconds. It was a mere fable, but she believed it, and the discipline of her household was none the less severe. Wild gave her abundant money for housekeeping. She had as complete a service as even a nobleman might desire. Not a dish that was cooked but she took a personal and active interest in its preparation. Jonathan Wild was as luxurious as he was cruel ; though he boasted, and with truth, that he neither wasted his substance nor his time upon women.

"My dear Marshal, old friend," said Wild, seizing the officer's hand, which Hichen gave unwillingly, "a little plot that will do your heart good, and deal a blow that your detractors and enemies will stagger under. Profitable, to boot, in a material way—very profitable, Master Hichen—give you, with what you already possess, enough to retire on."

"And, by the Lord, I shall want it, if these lampoons go on being published."

He thrust under Wild's nose a squib decorated with a gibbet.

Wild took it from him, tore it up, and stamped upon it. He knew how to impress his weak but mercenary and scheming dupe.

"That is where we will put the infamous concocters of all such unsavoury libels."

"Yes, it's all very well to say that, but can we do it? How are we going to find them?"

On the spur of the moment Wild invented the Marshal's assailants.

"My dear Marshal, look for the ingrates who stab you in the back among those you have befriended. I have discovered your enemies, and they shall hang."

"You know who has written this lampoon?" said Hichen, pointing to the fragments on the floor.

"And I fear by some devilish means they must have had access to some of your secret papers."

"Impossible!" said Hichen.

"There is nothing impossible outside Newgate. By the way, what have you done to make Blueskin and Sheppard your enemies?"

"Done! Nothing that duty did not compel me to do; and at your request I have done much for them that I ought not to have done."

"That's it," said Wild. "Ingratitude! Curse them, both! I have fed and clothed them, made life a round of adventure and high living for them, and they plot against me. . . . Listen, dear comrade! To-morrow night, Sheppard and Blueskin crack me The Cedars, at Islington."

"But Sheppard is lagged; I assisted at his capture."

"You did? I was not aware of that. All the more reason for his malicious attack upon you."

"But he's no writer," said the Marshal.

"Is he not, i' faith? Writes poetry, too! Why, my dear friend, the lad had a very good education before he

was placed apprentice with Master Wood. Damme, there's no knowing what he might have been if he'd lived what they call honestly! Might have sat in judgment upon you on your trial for breach of trust in your office."

"Master Wild!"

"Ah, ah!" chuckled Wild. "I thought you'd appreciate that little joke! There now, don't frown. Sheppard has once more escaped from Newgate, as easily as he has escaped from nearly every roundhouse. You assisted at his capture; you shall do the same again."

The City Marshal took the scabbard of his sword in his right hand, sat down upon the nearest chair, and looked sulkily at his boots. He was puffed up, in flesh and vanity. He had protruding eyes, loose thick lips, bulky hands, and his manner was pompous. Contrasting the psychological characteristics of the two men, it was easy to understand that Wild would be the dominating partner in any alliance between them. When in anger, Hichen pulled his cocked hat over his brows and clanked his sword, and pursed his lips, and swore by his Maker and all the hosts of heaven. He was Bombastes, without the cowardice of that noted Furioso. Hichen had, indeed, a good deal of physical courage, but of moral force none. A sneak and a thief, he fell into the hands of one who was his equal in vice, but greatly his superior in mental capacity and cunning.

"The affair stands thus. Master Owen Wood has removed from the bank certain papers that are mine; of no intrinsic value. They only concern a question between Wood and me; to any other not worth a silver button of your fine official coat, my dear friend; but I want them. To-morrow night Blueskin and Jack Sheppard will break into The Cedars. Wood has accumulated plate and other valuables His strong box contains specie

of a considerable amount. He has lately purchased jewels for his wife. The two thieves will rendezvous, with their booty, at the 'Black Lion.' You will take a *posse* of your own or my men, and either seize upon the robbers, red-handed, on the spot, or you will surprise them at the height of their pernicious bliss at the 'Lion.' That we will consider. In either case the booty is yours, or such of it as you may choose to retain, with any reward obtainable from Wood and all the honour and glory of the transaction; my only reward the small packet of papers, tied with ribbon and sealed with black wax, and the pleasure of revenge on two ungrateful scoundrels."

"Islington is out of my beat," said Hichen.

"No spot under heaven is out of the beat of a great official when crime is to be detected and punished."

"Why not employ Quilt Arnold, and deal with the case yourself?" said Hichen.

"One man cannot play all the parts in a comedy. Moreover, it would serve no good purpose were I to act as you suggest. True, I could put the Lord Mayor's own men on the track. But they are under no cloud. Now you are, my dear Marshal. There has been talk in council of your suspension from office."

"Zounds! Wild, what the devil do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. I had hoped to give you this chance of rehabilitation without acquainting you with one of my chief motives. You and I cannot afford for either the one or the other to be discredited. You are in the employment of the State. By this proposed arrest of two scamps, supposed to be more or less in league with me, you will establish your independence and individual action as thief-taker-in-chief, and show how free you are from any influence of Jonathan Wild."

"There is reason in what you say," the City Marshal answered, as he recalled to mind the hundred and one

instances of breach of trust concerning which his suspension from office, and, indeed, his prosecution, might be demanded. "And I am alive to the importance of our seeming independence or rivalry of each other."

"Of course you are. Your fall would be my confusion. Hit one of us, both suffer," said Wild. "And there is great honour and glory to be won in the recapture of Sheppard with the plunder in his possession."

"One looks for more than honour and glory when one risks one's life," said Hichen; "and Blueskin is a bloodthirsty ruffian."

"You want a higher reward than honour and glory? Have I not offered it to you, in the restoration of your credit and renown with the authorities? If you want more, then there is the keenest of earthly bliss, that of having your enemies by the throat. . . . Blueskin and Sheppard are the authors of the lampoon that has lacerated your pride!"

Hichen stamped about the stone floor, and clanked his sword.

"If they did not write it, they inspired a Grub Street scribbler to do their dirty work."

Hichen clenched his fists.

"Curse them both! Let me nab them red-handed, and hang them!"

"You shall," said Wild, taking snuff, and inwardly chuckling over the rage of his partner in infamy.

"Curse them, I say, curse them!" the Marshal repeated.

"By all means, old friend," said Wild, taking the Marshal's arm and leading him to the secret panel. "Come and soothe your injured feelings over a stoup of liquor, and let us curse them together!"

CHAPTER XXIII

AN UNEXPECTED AND ROMANTIC MEETING

THERE is nothing more curious in fiction than coincidences that are common enough in real life. It was not a little strange, nevertheless, that Ellaline Wood and Jack Sheppard should have met on the morning after Wild had unfolded his plan of cupidity and vengeance to be achieved at Islington. Ellaline had driven with her father into the city. He had afterwards permitted her the use of the family carriage on a shopping expedition and she had resolved to visit Wych Street. Something seemed to draw her thither, something more than mere inclination. Jack wanted a particular tool, belonging to the shop, for the purposes of the night's expedition, some of the best of his implements having been seized and confiscated by the Newgate authorities, not even Master Wild having on hand the ingenious locksmith's contrivances that were part of the equipment of Wood's old shop in Wych Street. Disguised as a young country lad up from Surrey with his father's market carts, he made his way to Wych Street, in the hope of at least finding a friend, if not an ally, in Bill Winch or Ned Smith, both of whom were his ardent admirers.

Jack lounged into Fleet Street, and thence to his old quarters. He gazed into the shop windows and looked up at the curious overhanging signs with open mouth, as country folk will do. Finally, peering into the front windows of Wood's once familiar house, he made his way to the back and up the stairs into the carpenter's shop, as Blueskin had done the day the tempter besought Jack to give up all idea of the highway and take to the

glorious life of a cracksman. Through the half-open door Jack heard women's voices. Peeping in, he saw a group of timbers in the corner where Blueskin had originally hidden himself. Creeping into the same retreat, he overheard an interesting, not to say touching, conversation. One of the speakers being Ellaline Wood, if he had had any sense of honour, or the shame that at times will overcome the most abandoned of eavesdroppers, he would have made himself known or beaten a retreat. But we have to take Sheppard for what he was, not what he might have been.

"No, mistress, there's no work doing to-day. The master and the men, apprentices likewise, are having their bean-feast down at Mortlake."

"You don't know me," said Ellaline. "I am Owen Wood's daughter, from whom your husband, as I take the present master to be, bought this Wych Street business."

"Deary, deary!" said the woman; "and I'd been and put you down as some ladyship or other called about some difficult piece of work, for we be celebrated here for skill in cabinets and locks, thanks to the fame of Master Owen Wood."

"I am glad to hear that my father's good reputation still holds," said Ellaline, "and that he has found a worthy successor."

"Of that be you assured," said the woman. "There's no better workman, no better husband, no better master, than Ephraim Thorpe; and, come next October, we will have been man and wife for five-and-twenty year. Can I offer you a little of anything, mistress mine?"

"No, thank you," said Ellaline.

"A thimbleful of a cordial I makes myself, and which ain't to be despised now the autumn's getting on, and we may soon look for winter."

"No, thank you, Mistress Thorpe. And yet, there is a favour I would ask."

"What is it, my dear? Give it a name, and I am most humbly at your service."

"Let me stay here, by myself, a little while. You see, although we are rich now and have what they call a fine house at Islington, and I ride in my father's own coach, I was born and bred in Wych Street, and some of the happiest hours of my life have been spent in this shop, at first sitting on the corner of a bench, watching my father at work; then, later, toddling in at odd times to play among the shavings; and, later still, taking an interest in my father's apprentices."

"One of them was——"

"Yes, Jack Sheppard, who carved his name on that beam," said Ellaline, interrupting her, and looking up at the timber which Jack had decorated with his autograph; "and Master Eric Beryl; one they called the Idle, the other the Industrious Apprentice. I see you know all about them. And there was another called Winch, and another called Smith, and——"

"The foreman, named Longden, a very good workman, though eccentric in his hours; but he's left us."

"Quite a man of sentiment, he was," said Ellaline. "I suppose he has set up in business for himself?"

"I can't say. But there, I have my beds to make and other bits of household slavery, so I will leave you to rest here, since you desire it; and I need not say that when you would like to come into the house, you know your way, and whatever I can get for you to eat or drink it is only for you to name it. I can quite understand how a kind-hearted lady such as I am sure you be, and not proud as some would be in your new station, can feel an interest in the scenes of her childhood, which is a song my husband often sings when inclined to be mirthful."

So soon as Ellaline was alone she vaulted upon the bench where she had sat not, seemingly, so very long ago and in her coquettish way refused the hand of Eric Beryl. Her eyes wandered around the old place, with its tools now all packed away, its planes on their shelves, its saws hung up, its benches clear, its fire out, with a cold glue-pot on the hob, its lockers fastened, and above all, its inscribed beam of "JACK SHEPPARD" shining in the sun. She noticed that certain crude pictures of highwaymen, copies of verses, and torn ballads that had adorned the walls, in company with tools of various descriptions, had been replaced with a copy of "Rules for Carpenters," a rough engraving of Queen Anne, and another of George I. and a plate representing in a very wooden kind of way the latest defeat of the Pretender. With these immaterial differences, the shop was the same dear old place to Ellaline. Jack Sheppard watched her through a chink in the timber behind which he was hiding. Presently, he made a little noise to attract the girl's attention. She turned. Then he coughed slightly. She started.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "It is only an old friend, though a scamp."

"Jack Sheppard!" exclaimed Ellaline, blushing deeply, and then becoming so pale that Jack was alarmed and rushed to support her.

"No, thank you; it is nothing," she said, regaining her self-possession; "you only alarmed me a little. I am very glad to see you."

She leaned against the bench where he had worked during most of the years of his apprenticeship, and looked at him.

"You knew me, through this disguise?" he said, pulling off a red wig and thrusting it into his pocket.

"I knew your voice," she said, "though I had believed, alas, that you were in prison."

"I got out yesterday; slipped the darbies, as they say," he replied, with something of pride in his manner. "It's a great fight, between me and Newgate, Mistress Ellaline; and so far I am the conqueror!"

"Oh, Jack," said Ellaline, with a sigh, "if you would only make a greater fight for honour and safety!"

"It's very good of you to wish it, but——"

"I am sure it is not your fault; it is your evil companions. If you were as brave in an honest course as you are in combatting jailers, you might be happy and respected; I'm sure you might."

"Well, look here, now," said Jack, dropping his tone of bravado, "I'll try . . . after to-night."

"Why after to-night?"

"Why, you see, I'm engaged on my honour to do a thing to-night which my heart's against. It really is; I'm speaking no lie——"

"I did not think you were."

"I assure you I'm not. I've undertaken a job to-night that I'm bound to do. If it is well done, Eric Beryl is safe; not only of his life, but of his fortune."

"But if it is not an honourable thing——"

"Wouldn't you do anything for Eric Beryl?" asked Jack, eagerly.

"Almost anything to save his life," she answered; "as, indeed, I would for you."

"Oh, thank you," he said, with a trembling lip. "Do you know that Eric's life is in danger?"

"We knew it was; we also knew that he had been saved by you."

"Oh, but that's months ago. He's been carried to Holland since then; and retaken into captivity——"

"Only yesterday father had a message of comfort concerning him from Master Jonathan Wild, who assured us that Eric is alive and well, and that he has hopes

he might soon be free and safe from all other persecution."

"Indeed," said Jack, "that is good news." And it made him happy to feel that this was in keeping with Wild's promise to him on the completion of that night's work.

"Eric no longer hunted and probably with his ambition fulfilled, and you, Jack, also at liberty—if not in England, in some other pleasant country—think how happy we all might be, my father and you and Eric! And how we should all look back to happy hours in this old shop, before you were tempted and Eric took that rash step of going to restore the portrait of his father which you brought here out of love for him!"

"Ah, Ellaline!" said Jack, looking at her pathetically, "if we could only know what would come of a bad habit before we persisted in the same, how different things might be!"

Then, rousing himself, he said, "But it's no good looking back, any more than it was to try and look forwards. Nevertheless, to-night's my last adventure; if it comes off right, why, then. . . . Well, never mind; I'll make no rash vows. Goodbye, Mistress Wood——"

"Call me Ellaline, as you used to do," she said, removing her long grey glove and disclosing the whiteness of her generous hand, which she held out to him, tears in her eyes.

"Ellaline!" he said, in a low voice, "Ellaline!"

She looked at him sorrowfully. He thought of Eric, and the ambition she spoke of that was to be fulfilled. Eric's own ambition was to win the love of Ellaline. Should he, even if it were possible, rob Eric of this happiness, and bring Ellaline to misery? A rush of happy memories passed through his mind, eclipsed, as soon as born, with dark and grim shadows—the revels at Hock-

ley, the debased if devoted love of Edgeworth Bess, his own utter unworthiness even to breathe the same atmosphere as Ellaline Wood. In a vague kind of way it came into his mind to tell her all—to confess his pledge to Wild; his object in the proposed visit to her father's house that night; the mystery of the packet in her father's strong box—but it was all a whirl of unconnected, inconsequential, and uncertain desires and hopes, overmastered at last with the black knowledge of his condition and darker prospects. There was, nevertheless, one dominating idea, that perhaps, after the night was over, he might take ship for some distant land and forget the past—or become a pirate, the devil seemed to suggest. A grim smile fluttered about his ill-shaped mouth, and he let the girl's hand fall.

"Goodbye," he said. "You and this shop together are the only glimpse of heaven I'm ever likely to know. Goodbye, Ellaline. Goodbye."

When presently the woman of the house, thinking Ellaline stayed a long time, returned to the shop, she found her sitting upon a bench and crying bitterly.

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM WYCH STREET TO MERRY ISLINGTON

LATE autumn at Islington. A picturesque, undulating country. Here and there a wayside house, now and then an inn. Quiet roadways. Night is coming on. In those days people did not care to be out late. The highwayman and the footpad were factors to be counted with. The Cedars was a pretty house, old-fashioned

even at the date of our story. A fine specimen of picturesque domestic architecture of brick and timber, surrounded by garden and park of modest dimensions, it fronted south-west from the road, and was approached by a carriage-drive. The house had been built for comfort, and the grounds laid out with regard to beauty, not overshadowed by the pretence of wealth. It was a snug abode; and there could be nothing more characteristically English than the terrace of lawn spread out beneath the dining- and drawing-room windows where Ellaline Wood and her mother sat talking upon a well-cushioned seat.

The two ladies were lavishly attired; the elder of the two more particularly, her bodice cut unusually low and her head-dress built up unusually high. Ellaline wore the long waist of the period, with a kerchief not so closely draped that you might not see more than a suggestion of the fair neck and shoulders.

"You never cared for poor Jack," said the girl.

"Did I ever like beggars, and such?" Mistress Wood replied, with a touch of asperity in the tone of her voice and a protesting flutter of her fan. "I was not born to it. Before I married your father I was a lady; my father was a merchant, wholesale, and lived in good style in Cheapside."

"Yes, dear; you have often told me so."

"And will tell you so again, Ellaline, since you are inclined to forgetfulness."

"No, I don't forget; I know that you were always a lady," said the girl, with a conciliatory gesture.

"Not when I was a mere carpenter's wife; now, of course, it is different, living retired. Dear, dear! how you are a-sitting. Do think of attitood, Ellaline; it means so much."

Ellaline, who had been leaning in the direction of her

step-mother with a desire to express something of sympathy towards her "retired" ladyship, now sat primly and upright, but at the same time keeping to the subject of the conversation which she had started.

"Jack Sheppard has escaped again, they say," Ellaline went on.

"Who's they?"

"People in London," Ellaline replied.

It is next to impossible for the most virtuous to go through life without the aid of a white lie or two. Ellaline did not intend that her step-mother should know of her visit that morning to Wych Street, and certainly not that she had met Jack Sheppard.

"He will come to the gallows at last."

"Oh, mother, don't say that!" Ellaline exclaimed, as she thought of the bright, alert, and seemingly penitent lad with whom she had that morning conversed once more in the old shop at Wych Street.

"I can only say it will be a scandal if such a reprobate and villain does not meet with his deserts."

"If we had only taken more interest in his welfare, and assisted him to give up his evil companions, he might have had an honest and useful career; who knows?"

"Who knows, indeed! He was born a scamp, else he would never have continued to walk in the same."

"We are none of us answerable for our birth."

"The devil, they say, takes care of his own. Sheppard would have been hanged else long ago."

"How you hate the poor lad! And yet he saved Eric Beryl's life."

"And proud he should have been of the opportunity."

"Oh, mother, don't be so hard on him!"

"Why not? You never seem to think how he's been and disgraced us; your father's apprentice. Madame Money-Dashwood spoke of it the last time we met; and

he has made Wych Street and the entire neighbourhood horrible to me. To think that we should have been rearing a viper like that!"

"It is all very sad," said Ellaline, with a sigh.

"You drove with your father to Master Jonathan Wild's this morning; but you never brought me any message, if there was any, and I hoped as your father would let me know."

"I waited for him a little time at Master Wild's door, and was the object of much tiresome curiosity; every passer-by peeped in at the windows of the coach."

"They don't often see so fine a chariot, my dear," said Mistress Wood, with a proud toss of her head. "I flatter myself we have taste!"

"Master Wild's house is notorious; and the mystery of it, I think, made people wonder what I might be waiting for. Presently my father came to the door, and said I had better go home alone; he would be detained some time. 'And tell your mother,' he said, 'that Master Wild promises his active assistance to restore our dear Eric to liberty and to fortune.'"

"I never doubted that Providence would protect him," said Mistress Wood.

"And Providence did not abhor Jack Sheppard as an instrument of his rescue," Ellaline replied. "Don't you remember the sea-stained scrap of paper that Eric sent us, soon after his first disappearance?—'I owe my life to Jack Sheppard; if I lose it, Jonathan Wild and Sir Patrick Brent will be my murderers.'"

It was not a little dramatic that at this moment Callaghan, Wood's Irish man-servant, should step upon the terrace to announce, "Sir Patrick Brent, my ladies both," in his most original fashion; for he made a point of impressing Mistress Wood with his own ideas of social distinction and elevated manners.

"Sir Patrick Brent!" exclaimed the two ladies, together.

"And I've shown the gintleman into the best parlour."

"Very well," said Mistress Wood.

"Thank ye, my lady," said Callaghan, with an awkward bow that was meant to be elegant.

"Whatever shall we do?" said Mistress Wood, rising from her seat and whisking her train to and fro with nervous anxiety.

"See him, of course," said Ellaline, calmly.

"And do you believe they intended to murder Eric?" asked Mistress Wood, suddenly confronting her stepdaughter.

"Father is inclined to think Jack Sheppard may have been misled in his solicitude for Eric's safety."

"I never believed a word of it!" said Mistress Wood, thus encouraged in her desire to make social capital out of this call of Sir Patrick Brent. "We will ask Sir Patrick to supper. It will take the starch out of the Money-Dashwoods of Canonbury, and bring the green of jealousy into the eyes of Alderman Stackpole's lady. Attitood, Ellaline, attitood! Do put on your politest manners! Let us both be *come ill foo!*"

Ellaline rose, as Callaghan, with another elegant bend of his shaggy head, preceded Sir Patrick Brent, who was booted and spurred and carried a riding-whip.

"Pardon me, ladies," said Sir Patrick; "an informal call; told that you were in the garden, ventured to present myself."

Here the lady of the house curtseyed with exaggerative politeness.

"I had a little business with Master Wood; have travelled from the north, slept last night at St. Albans; and Master Wood has no longer any business quarters in

London, so I concluded to ride over to Islington ; honoured to be permitted to pay my respects to my friend's wife—and daughter, I presume," glancing at Ellaline.

"The same, Sir Patrick," replied the lady of the house. "Permit me the honour, likewise—my stepdaughter, Ellaline Wood, Sir Patrick Brent, baronet !"

Sir Patrick bowed.

"We are a-hexpecting of Master Wood every minute, Sir Patrick, Might we have the extreme felicity of your company to supper, Sir Patrick? It will confer much honour."

"You are very kind, madame; but I am in riding costume, and I observe that you have company."

"Masther and Misthtress the Honourable Money-Dashwoods, my lady, have arrived in their coach, and I have introduced their honour and ladyship into the lib'ery," said Callaghan, with a flourish of his arm, indicating the direction of the "lib'ery."

"Say we are engaged at the moment with Sir Patrick Brent, baronet, but will join them immediate."

"That will I, my lady," said Callaghan, backing into a low branch of one of the great cedars, as he strove to make a dignified exit.

"As a traveller, Sir Patrick, your excuse is ample, that you are not in company dress," said madame.

"Then I shall do myself the pleasure to remain. I am hoping that Master Wood may be able to tell me that my dear nephew, Eric Beryl, is still alive."

"Oh, we have no doubt about it, Sir Patrick," the lady replied, once more arranging her train, that dragged heavily.

"The devil confound him !" though Brent.

This was news indeed, the reverse of what Brent hoped. The truth was he had not ridden in from the north. He had been in London for some time. If he

had been wise, he would not have insulted Quilt Arnold, whom he had met by accident not far from the anchorage of Wild's sloop. Quilt might have helped Brent instead of hindering him, had not Brent rebuffed him and denied his own identity when Quilt accosted him. Quilt being persistent in his recognition, Brent had struck him across the head with his cane, an assault and an affront likely to cost Brent dearly. Sir Patrick, doubting Wild's positive assurance that Eric Beryl was dead, and being unable to procure from him the papers he had so often promised and for which Brent had paid considerable sums on account, he had disguised himself and played the spy; but without any satisfactory result. The visit to The Cedars was more or less an act of desperation. Knowing the deep interest the Woods felt in Eric's welfare, he risked a rebuff in calling there; for he understood well enough to what a grave extent they regarded him as the enemy of Wood's aristocratic apprentice.

"I am indeed rejoiced to be so well assured of the dear lad's safety."

"Oh, yes, my husband, Master Wood, had a message from Master Wild yesterday, consoling us with a happy report of the sweet young gentleman's safety; and Master Wood is in town this very day to consult with Master Wild about our dear Eric's haffairs."

Sir Patrick felt the chill of a terrible disappointment, followed by a hot resolve to be avenged on Wild; but he could be as foxy and diplomatic as Wild himself on occasion.

"Are you reconciled to him?" asked Ellaline.

"Reconciled, my dear child! Only knew of his existence less than a year ago; rejoiced to find the son of my dear sister, so long mourned dead, was alive; it was the one gleam of sunshine that illumined my sister's deathbed. She knew I should have but one object in life—

to hand over the Brent estates to the rightful heir, to see him in possession of her own, and the title of Sir Eric Waller, with a reversion to that of Brent. But, as Fate would have it, he disappeared almost at the moment of his discovery, and in a short time was chronicled as dead."

"Indeed! We did not know that," said Ellaline. "We only knew that he had been charged with crime, falsely charged; that he had escaped, and had been recaptured and carried off, we feared, to be sold into slavery, or pressed for the navy, or held back in some mysterious way from claiming his possessions, and by you, Sir Patrick."

"Ellaline!" said Mistress Wood.

"Nay, my dear madame; I admire the honest frankness of your daughter."

"Step-daughter," said Mistress Wood.

"I stand corrected; your step-daughter. I honour her frankness. I had heard of the libel that had been set about; and, indeed, my journey from the north is to see Master Wild, and, if possible, procure the arrest of those who have dared to blister the name of Brent with cowardice and fraud."

"Good, very good!" exclaimed Mistress Wood; "and I hope my step-daughter is satisfied?"

"I am glad to hear Sir Patrick Brent defend himself so warmly," said Ellaline.

"It is a hateful name to mention, Sir Patrick," said Mistress Wood, "and I am sure I shall not be charged with desiring to say a good word for him; but it is said that Jack Sheppard saved Eric's life, and I think it was something about drowning or being shot in a skirmish. But there, the matter is not in the least *come ill foo*, and I think we had better change the subject."

"Not at all, dear madame," said Brent. "If Sheppard has been of the least assistance to my nephew I am

greatly beholden to him, and will reward him—that is, so soon as he next escapes from prison."

"It were a good deed to rescue Jack Sheppard from his evil companions," said Ellaline. "We know that he is not really wicked at heart; he is the victim of evil associations. It was a generous action in the interest of another that first led him astray."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Brent, thoughtfully tapping his boot with his whip as he seated himself by the side of the lady of the house. "By the way, when did you last see Master Eric?"

"Not since the day he went to your house in Leicester Fields, to restore the portrait belonging to Lady Waller—his mother."

There was a studied significance in the girl's answer and the manner of it, that showed Brent that, however complacent the mother might be, the daughter suspected him.

"Ah," he replied, with affected sympathy, "that was an unhappy business. Oh, if I had only known that the poor, dear trembling lad had been my nephew! Think of it, my dear young lady. Here was I, on the eve of the death of my dear sister, who had for years been seeking her lost son, and we had regarded her as a monomaniac, the poor child's death by drowning having been so well established; here was I in the very presence of the poor fellow, and obliged to stand by and see him proved guilty of theft, and without knowing him. And as it turned out, the theft was ordained of Fate to prove his identity; the stolen jewel was the picture of his father. My dear ladies, you cannot understand my feelings. There are episodes in the story that delicacy prevents me from mentioning. It would compel me not only to refer to an abduction, but to a worse crime; not to mention an encounter between myself and the unhappy man

that time proves to have been unnecessary. More I may not venture to explain at present. But I am sure you will believe me when I say that my only desire is to free my sister's memory from reproach, and to restore her son to his name and estates——"

"Ah, Sir Patrick, this is indeed a surprise!" exclaimed Wood, hurrying to shake his guest's hand. "And a delight, for many reasons. The very man of all others I would have desired to see at this moment. Master Jonathan Wild is sending messengers after you to Derbyshire."

"Indeed?"

"Perhaps you have heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Eric Beryl is not only alive and well, but likely to be restored to us in a few short days. And Master Wild is anxious for your counsel and assistance."

"My dear sir, your good wife has already taken the keen edge off your precious information. I need not say how overjoyed I am."

"Masther and Mishthress Alderman Stackpole have arrived, my lady, and is taking off their cloaks in the hall; likewise my Lady Bligh, the banker's widdy."

"Come, then, Ellaline; Lady Bligh is a stranger, and we must show her partickler politeness. *O riever*, Sir Patrick! Don't let Master Wood detain you. Attitood, Ellaline." And madame let her train go, and swept with it over the grass and into the gravelled pathway that led to the side entrance beneath the cedars.

Ellaline quietly followed, after a gracious curtsey to Sir Patrick, who smiled upon her; but she thought, all the same, that he looked as if he would have liked to beat her.

"You have a beautiful place here," said Brent to Wood.

"Thanks to the taste of my daughter," the latter answered, "and my selling South Seas and other stocks at the right moment."

"I congratulate you."

"I think I was born lucky; some men are; others just the opposite. What an unfortunate fellow your nephew has been!"

"Most unfortunate."

"The only cheerful thing in all his career, it seems to me, was your generous acknowledgment of him, after his escape from the Roundhouse and his recapture, with that young scamp Sheppard, at Hockley. And then, almost at the same moment for him to lose his life in the river, as was reported! Indeed, Master Wild, who made every inquiry, had no doubt about it; it was said to have happened during the lad's efforts to escape from his pursuers. I assure you it made my heart ache; and the more so, that he may be said to have begun life by being half-drowned. But happily, all suspense is now over; and by this time we hope he is under the active protection of Master Wild himself—a wonderful man, sir, when you pay him well for his services and are not above being grateful."

"So I have always understood."

"Indeed you must have experienced this as much as I," said Wood. "And yet, you know, they do say odd things about you in this matter. Jack Sheppard, for example, says you sought Eric Beryl's life."

"Jack Sheppard!" said Brent, with a contemptuous swish of his whip.

"A tainted source, I grant you; very tainted."

"But when do you expect to receive your lost apprentice? He will be able to do me justice."

"The lad has bitter enemies, secret and vindictive; Wild thinks they are relatives. He did not speak of you

as if he loved you, but he is a strange creature, and has hidden in his overcharged bosom, they say, all the worst secrets of London, and, indeed, half the secrets of the British aristocracy; besides rogues and vagabonds, and highwaymen, an army of them!"

"I have heard as much," said Brent. "But why he should not speak well of me——"

"Nay, I did not say that. It only occurred to me that, in contrast with his almost affectionate solicitude for our dear friend, Eric, he spoke of you in an offhand way, though he is most anxious to consult you in regard to the proper legal manner of proclaiming Eric Beryl and at the same time protecting him from secret and mysterious persecution, even to the length of attempts on the lad's life."

"I shall hasten to give Master Wild my best advice."

"That I am sure you will. Heaven takes its own good time, Sir Patrick, but the virtuous and the good triumph at last!"

"That is the consolation of all honest men, sir," Brent replied.

A servant interrupted further conversation by the announcement of supper.

"Come, Sir Patrick; I will lead the way. A bowl of turtle, a dish of Thames trout, a round of beef, a glass of good wine; and we'll try to look on the merry side of life, and drink to the restoration of your nephew, my dear young apprentice and friend, who is to be Sir Thomas or Eric Waller."

"And at my death, Sir Eric or Sir Thomas Brent, if he so desire."

"Long may you live to enjoy the title yourself," said Wood.

"And that slimy scoundrel, Wild, swore he was dead! —drowned in the North Sea!" muttered Brent to himself, as he followed his host in to supper.

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE BEST TIME TO CRACK A CRIB

HARDLY were Master Owen Wood's guests seated, than there appeared in the darkening shadows of the trees and shrubs the burly figure of Blueskin. He drew his shabby coat, with its shoulder-cape, about him and looked cautiously right and left. Then, on tiptoe, as if the soft turf might betray him, he crept into the darkness of the patriarchal cedars, through which the last beams of the sun were lingering. In the colder light of the east a crescent moon peered forth. The bright light from the window of the dining-room, modified by newly-drawn curtains, deepened the twilight shadows. In the best parlour the candles had been extinguished. The firelight flickered on the blinds. There were dim lights in the rooms above. It was a pleasant picture of a country house. Standing upon the lawn, outside the dining-room window, you could hear the cheery voices of the guests. The house straggled away from the front in receding gables, and there was a light in one of the furthest upper rooms that looked like the lantern of an old tower.

Blueskin took in the whole scene, not from its artistic point of view, but with burglarious motives. He was a picturesque old vagabond too, quite in keeping with the aspect of the house. He wore a close-fitting jerkin beneath his cloak, and tucked into his belt were a dark lantern and a knife. His pistols were well out of sight. Wrapped about his waist was a piece of stuff that looked like an ornamental drapery. It was a bag, capable of holding considerable booty, for which also his coat was well supplied with pockets. He wore the traditional

three-cornered hat, which has been revived of late years for juveniles, with the title of "the Jack Sheppard." Around his neck was a red silk neckerchief, that at times he wore as a head-dress beneath his hat. Over his tightly fitting breeches were drawn the uppers of his jack-boots, made of a soft leather, with soles that were almost as noiseless as the indiarubber of our own day. It was necessary that a gentleman of his occupation should be able to walk over polished floors with a tread that awoke no echoes.

"Wonder who the tall covey was, with the spurs?" he was saying to himself, having been in hiding not far away during the conversation of Wood and Brent. "The others must have been members of the Wood family. Couldn't hear a word they were saying. Quite a festive party. Wot it is to be rich and virtuous! South Sea stock's made a man of old Wood. A man did I say! Bless my soul, it's 'Good day to you,' now, 'Master Wood, and how is your honour.'"

As he thought rather than spoke this soliloquy, he emerged slightly from the shadow of the trees and looked hard across the lawn towards the meadows whence he had entered the grounds, and put his hand to the back of his ear, as if the better to detect some distant sound.

"Jack's late," he continued. Then, taking up what he would have called the parable if Master Wild had been the speaker, he remarked, "But you won't be so rich by a good thousand or two to-morrow, I am a-thinkin,' Master Wood. Not as you'll miss it, my covey; we wouldn't be so hard on you as to deprive you of a single mark if you couldn't well afford it, not by any manner of means."

The chuckle in which he was about to indulge by way of personal tribute to his own delicate humour was checked by a low whistle, followed by the unmistakable

humming of "Nix my dolly," as a variation to the flute-like signal.

"S-s-s-sh! you fool," whispered Blueskin, as Jack stooped out of the light of the windows and joined his companion. "This ain't a prison you're breaking out of, an' I ain't a muddle-headed jailer. There's a party goin' on."

"So much the better," said Jack; "we can join them in a song—

'For it's my delight, on a shiny night,
In the season of the year.'"

"S-s-s-sh! Are you drunk?"

"Never was more sober," said Jack.

"Not even winked at a fortifier?"

"Well, just winked," said Jack; "seemed to me as this was a job that wanted the stimulus of strong waters."

"Not like you, Jack, to prime yourself for a trifling matter. Wot's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing's wrong; don't be afraid; I'm in the mood. Just a bit down, because I could hear nothing of Bess; I'd like to have known from her own lips that she'd failed to get at Eric."

"So you pledged fickle Fortune at the 'Swan,' eh, my covey? Well, much good may it do you. Cheer up, my hearty. The night's very young, and it's going to be dark; the sun's setting red as a boiled lobster, and there's a new moon that'll be as dim as a rushlight."

With the agility of a monkey Jack crept beneath the dining-room window, and standing in the shadow of a thick bush of evergreens, that, with the cedars, kept their state all the year round, peered in. Later, as the darkness came on, the oaks, and elms, and beeches dropped their leaves, and in the stillness of the night their fall could be heard.

"Oh, my crikey!" whispered Jack, as he gazed into

the dining-room through a slight opening in the curtains, "it's what you call a swaree, only more so; you should take a squint at the plate that's on the table, candelabra, urns, dishes—the swag we bagged at Richmond's pewter to it!"

Then, with sudden seriousness, Blueskin having joined him among the shrubs, he said, "I don't like this job."

"You'll stand by, all the same."

"I've a kind of presentiment against it."

"But a bargain's a bargain," said Blueskin, as they both crept deeper into the protecting shrubs. "And such a bargain! Jonathan Wild was never so liberal; and he keeps his word, I'll say that for him."

"How is it he wanted Eric's blood, and now he's willing he should go free?"

"Not only go free, but he's pledged to help him. Strikes me, too, as wonderful, seein' as he must have discovered the attempt of Bess and Mistress Cooke to release him."

"He didn't say as much."

"'Peared to me as he did; and knowed you'd put Bess up to it. Did you twig wot he said about bribin' his skipper? My opinion is he's split with that villain, Sir Patrick Brent, and that it's going to answer his purpose to arrange with Master Beryl."

"What the devil has Brent to do with it? If Lady Waller's his mother, or was, poor lady, what has Brent to do with the business?"

"I thought you'd got that secret out of Quilt Arnold."

"Damn Quilt Arnold! I can't make him out," said Jack. "I believe he's the greatest villain of us all."

"Oh, come, my covey, don't class me with a snivellin' sneak like Quilt Arnold! And don't ask me to explain Jonathan Wild's little game. Do you think this packet of papers we're to find is a move in it?"

"You are as deep as a well, Blue', and as fly as a ferret. Blame me! I shouldn't wonder; I never thought of that. Wild gave us his solemn word, didn't he?"

"And we gave him our ours," said Blueskin.

"I'd die for Eric," said Jack; "but this affair goes against me like the very devil."

"Wood was a cruel, hard master to you, Jack," said Blueskin, diplomatically.

"He was."

"And old Mother Wood treated you worse than a nigger on a plantation?"

"She did."

"Then how does the job go agen you?"

"The sweetest words as ever were said to me were said by Ellaline Wood; and whenever I've had a good dream and fancied myself a kid at school, I've seen her smiling, as if she was an angel—which she is. Blue', by God! Blue', I feel like a fool to-night—as if I'd been to a church and said my prayers."

Before Blueskin could respond, Jack, with a warning "Sh-sh-sh!" stooped to listen, and, with professional caution, whispered, "Some one stirring, near the gate yonder!"

"The wind among Wood's ivy. Come here, Jack; best point of observation's the cedars yonder." And they both made a wide circuit and got back to Blueskin's first hiding-place, where it was almost as easy for Jack to look in upon Wood's company, which seemed to be his one great desire, to the confusion and trepidation of Blueskin.

"Sit down, my lad," said the old hand; and when they were well within cover, "What tools have you brought? I'm going to smoke. We didn't count on a party, did we, my covey?"

"I told you we should strike the ground too early," said Jack.

"Not a bit of it, my covey," said Blueskin, covering his tinder-box with his hat, striking a light, and smoking as calmly as if he had been an invited guest of Owen Wood or enjoying a picnic by his permission. "And I'm not sorry they're havin' a party; keeps all hands busy; and everybody goes to bed careless and happy, never givin' a thought to a mill-ken or a bridle-cull;" which, in plain language, means a house-breaker or a highwayman.

Neither Blueskin nor Jack often used cant phrases or flash words to each other, though they were proficient enough in the flash lingo of the profession when they met colleagues and comrades on festal occasions.

Jack lay down by Blueskin, his thoughts at the moment far away from the business in hand. Blueskin was also in a reminiscent frame of mind.

"Do you remember the first time we met?" he asked, shielding the light from his pipe beneath the cape of his cloak.

"I believe you, my boy," said Jack, imitating his companion's sepulchral whisper.

"Oh come, don't you get a-takin' the very words out o' my mouth!" Blueskin remonstrated, with a gurgle of amusement.

"You're a jolly old sinner, Blue'. If they get you into the Castle cell of Newgate you'll never get out."

"Couldn't get out of nowhere, I couldn't," said Blueskin.

"I'll wager you a guinea to a silver sixpence there's no jail that's built can hold me."

"And you've proved it, my lad, you've proved it," said Blueskin. "As for me, my only chance is in my

virtuous mug, and my innocent, lamb-like ways before a judge and jury."

"Have you got any liquor, Blue'?"

"Not until the work's done, my hearty; and then there's a spread and a bottle on the road that'll make your hair curl."

"The barbers of His Majesty's prisons don't leave my hair any chance to curl, Blue'. But I'll give it a rest after to-night. Couldn't we have a change? Go to sea, and be pirates on the briny deep, eh? Shouldn't I make a skipper bold and free?" And he startled Blueskin with something more than a whispered vocalisation of the suggestion—

"'It was a captain bold and free,
And he sailed the briny deep . . .'"

"Sh-sh-sh! you young fool! You'll make a hash of this night's work, that's what you'll do, if you go on that reckless."

"Don't be uneasy, old pal. Do you think I couldn't smell footsteps a mile off?" And he crept to a new point of observation, on the cedars side of the dining-room, and looked in upon the company from a more convenient opening in the curtains, turning now and then to make whispered comments to his comrade, who still sat smoking. It was now quite dark, and concealment was an easy matter.

"Can only see half the table," said Jack; "a lady and gentleman I never saw before to my knowledge. Oh, my eye! you should twig Mother Wood; she's like a tragedy queen at Bartlemy! They're getting up, the lady and the gentry cove. S-s-sh! 'Spent a delightful evening, I'm sure'" (mimicking the lady's finicking tone and then mocking Mrs. Wood). "'Under 'igh obligations, I'm sure—so *come ill foo* to have such charming neighbours.'"

"The mad young fool!" said Blueskin to himself and his pipe. "He'd make a saint grin!"

"Oh, heavens!" whispered Jack; "Mother Wood's smile! She'll make me sick! I shall throw my jemmy at her. See her make a curtsey! She'll fall backwards over her train. 'I'm sure, madame, it is a 'igh honour to hentertain such genteel company!' And now she's a-ogling the lady's husband. She had always a gift that way."

Then Jack, with a mock curtsey after the manner of the lady, crept back to Blueskin.

"Oh, you are a rummy cove!" said his contemplative comrade, pressing the light out of his pipe and replacing that consoling companion in his pocket.

"Old Wood was jealous of Dick Longden! A sly chap, Dick. I wonder if it was he who stopped the Canterbury coach—not the same name, except he was Dick Something; might have been him. I half suspected he was doing a bit of the road business, though he was always on the moral lay."

"The moral lay's a great game, Jack. Why, Dick Longden was in the 'bridle-cull' business when he was a-working with you, honest, in old Wood's shop, and pointin' the lessons of Tyburn to the 'prentices. He was at Hockley on that very night, long ago, when first Wild nabbed you and me and Eric!"

"The devil he was!"

"Come there to show Master Winch the sights of the town, and sloped when he see you and Bess a-comin'."

"I blush for the hypocrite, Blue'! He made love to Mistress Wood, on the sly, the villain! Oh, I must have another peep, Blue'!" and the lad crept back to the window. "Oh, if Wood only knew that woman! But they're all alike—except Ellaline. . . . I'll tell you a secret, Blue'. That girl was fond of me—when I was

honest and respectable;" and for a moment he was nearly confessing to the Wych Street interview of that very morning.

"Fond! Why, of course she was—don't all the gals love you, my covey, and don't the great ladies admire you?"

"None of that, Blue'!" said Jack, at the same time smiling conceitedly in the darkness. "But I do get on with the women, that's a fact," he said, with a laugh, falling back, however, into seriousness, as he added, "But there's none of 'em comes up to Mistress Ellaline Wood. It's a pity she should ever have thought anything of a scamp like me."

"Such a rover as you are, too!" remarked Blueskin.

"It would be a feather in any fellow's cap to win an honest, loving smile from Ellaline. I wish she had taken to Eric Beryl; he loved the very shavings her feet had trodden on. Pity she loved me best; but she did—she did—and she does so still, Blue'; and that's what's the matter with me to-night."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" said Blueskin. "I thought it was something serious."

"I wish you could see her, Blue'; she looks lovely. Come here!"

Blueskin was silenced for a moment by the opening bars of a love song, played daintily on a spinet.

"Cripple me!" said Jack, "if she isn't going to sing."

He made way for Blueskin at his side among the bushes, where they could both have a glimpse of the room.

"Not enough of her for my money," Blueskin whispered, as he crept back to his more secure hiding-place.

Jack crouched to the ground, silently listening to a time-worn ditty of unrequitted and longing love that Ellaline sang in a sweet, low voice that went straight to

the remnant of a human heart that, they say, Heaven keeps pure even in the vilest. Sentiment had a long way to penetrate before it reached the pearl in the shell of Jack's hardened heart; but the song almost fetched the tears into his eyes. They would soon have dried, however, had they wetted his cheeks. The deep impression one might have thought the meeting of the morning at Wych Street would have made on the lad was almost as fleeting as the shadows of drifting clouds on a summer sea. But the singing voice, the tender words of the love song, and the tinkling chords of the spinet moved the young scoundrel to make an appeal to Blueskin.

"Look here, old comrade, I must give it up. You're quite equal to work it alone, and you can keep the booty," said Jack. "I'm a fool to-night. I never could stand music. I remember my mother making me cry when I was a child and she sang a ballad of 'The Gipsy's Tent and Liberty.'"

"Oh, my eye!" scoffed Blueskin, turning his head away, as if to whisper to the trees. "Oh, my eye! Here's a fine Claude Du Val—here's a captain to work under! And to think, when we was ridin' along the North road, an hour or two agone, that we was on the very ground where Waters and Captain Hind done some of their best work! And you ain't made half their name yet, and talk like this!"

"Jeer at me, Blue', jeer," said Jack. "I love that girl; and, this night over, I'll lead a new life."

"Very well. Go and tell her so, and ask her father's consent to your marriage—in Newgate!"

"If I reformed ever so, I'd never disgrace her by confessing I loved her."

"Here, drink," said Blueskin, thrusting an uncorked flask into his hands. "Drink, you milksop! You've got the finest woman in London; what more do you want?"

Jack took a long, deep pull at the liquor, and, wiping his lips on his sleeve, handed the flask back to his comrade.

"Stand by your pal to-night, Jack, and to-morrow do what in thunder you please!" said Blueskin.

"Go ahead, Blue'. Forget what I've said; I'm in the game, up to the hilt. But no violence, mind—even if we fail."

"And Jack, like the cove in the play, is himself again!" chirruped Blueskin.

"Every inch, old man," said Jack. "I'm your pal, the same old pal, Blue'; a fool now and again, but comes to his senses when the flag's run up and the watchword's spoke and countersigned."

"That's my noble captain!" said Blueskin. "I ain't got no objection to poetry, when it don't interfere with business."

"Now they're off," said Jack, once more near the window. Then, drawing back hurriedly, he turned to Blueskin, to whisper, "My God, Blueskin! Do you know who's there? On that side the table, next to Wood, that I could only see part of? Sir Patrick Brent!"

"No!" said Blueskin, rising to his feet.

"True, as I live! And he's going out of the room with Ellaline Wood, as if he was a friend of the family. What's the meaning of it?"

"A plot against Wild. Diamond cut diamond. But Sir Patrick will be the diamond that gets cut."

"He's a murderer, Blue'," said Jack, in an excited whisper.

"And looks the trade, don't he, my covey? Why, we're babes unborn compared to a gentry-cove such as him!"

"Murdered Eric's father, killed Eric's mother—not

with his sword, but by ill-treatment—and has been in the plot to kill Eric, and must have got the better of Wild; for Wild to turn King's evidence, as one may say, to the favouring of Eric. What a hellish plot it is, Blue' !"

"As I says, we're innocence itself compared with such a pretender to virtue and honour. He's going for Master Wild, that's plain."

"God grant Eric don't get ground to death between two such millstones !"

"More likely to come to his own, as honest folks do, they say, when rogues fall out," said Blueskin. "You and me'll never fall out, Jack?"

"Not if there's no violence to-night."

"But you wouldn't mind me letting daylight into Sir Patrick Brent, eh, my covey?"

"Whatever happens afterwards, I want this night's work to go off as quietly as a moonlight flit. Sh-sh-sh ! There's a carriage at the entrance doors, and a servant bringing a horse up the drive from the stables down by the gates."

"What eyes you've got !" said Blueskin.

"My ears are my eyes, Blue'. Whip round to the terrace, and see them safely off the premises."

Blueskin disappeared, and Jack crept to the window. A six-footer in livery and a fat waiting-woman were clearing away the things. The candles had been relighted in the best parlour, but the guests said it was growing late. Moreover, the roads were not considered altogether safe. Not that they had far to go; except Brent, who was riding back to town, this time to Leicester Fields. The fat waiting-woman sat down to consume a tart or two, and the six-footer emptied the remainder of a decanter of port. Jack could almost hear the gurgle of the liquid as it made its way down the man's long throat; the very

idea seemed to set up a fresh thirst in Jack's. "Parches me to think of it," said the lad, as the woman began to wash down the tarts from a tall bottle of claret.

"Coach and postilions," said Blueskin, pulling Jack by the elbow. "Alderman Somebody and his lady —couldn't catch the name. The horse you heard coming up the drive is as sturdy a nag as Tom Waters might have ridden, and mounted by Sir Patrick— hopes to meet Master Wood again to-morrow. Two other carriages taking up. Five minutes, the coast'll be clear."

"Can Wood be scheming against Eric?" asked Jack.

"Wouldn't be surprised. When a man's rich, he ain't content, but must go on getting richer. Eric Beryl's entitled to wealth he can't claim 'cause he's dead, ain't that it?"

"A waif, as they say, and a stray, a sort of outcast; and if he is what we think, Wood, and Wild and Brent have got the secret among them. Brent has long had his hands on some of the property, and if he weren't afeard of Eric coming up in his rightful character, he'd have the lot; and it must have accumulated."

"What about Quilt Arnold? He's a fly covey."

"He was good to me once; let me overhear the beggars plotting. It's easy, they say, to put two and two together, and yet I can't do it. What's these papers in Wood's strong box, that's been for safe custody at the bank? And what's Wood taken them out of the bank for just now? And how did Wild know? And why does Wild want the papers so much that he'll give us everything else?"

"Don't go on asking me riddles, captain; I ain't no hand at riddles. Hush, my lad! Voices? No, there's an echo hereabouts. I noticed it awhile ago."

"Carriage wheels," said Jack.

Blueskin, with the alertness of a youngster, slipped away to the front of the house, and returned in a minute or two with the report: "Last carriage gone; gates fastened; our way is through the grounds, to the by-road. I know you know; only reminding you. Front doors locked and bolted. Coast clear."

The six feet of livery came to the window, drew the curtains close and put to the shutters, fastening them with a bar; and the lights of the room no longer shed a single ray upon the terrace. The candles were immediately afterwards extinguished in the best parlour, and the curtains and shutters closed.

"We've come an hour or two before we ought," said Jack.

"Not a bit of it," answered Blueskin. "Surely it was good luck brought us; else we'd never have known Brent and Wood was in confab; we must see about that to-morrow. Wild should add to what he calls our stipends for that bit of information."

"We've come too early, all the same; it'll be a good hour before we can do anything."

"B'lieve me, Jack," said Blueskin, taking the lad by the arm and drawing him once more well away from the terrace, but in general view of the house, "believe me, my lad, the best time to crack a crib is just when folks is goin' to bed, after a nice bit of supper with friends; then they goes to roost cackling; the ladies is a-combin' out their hair and a-remarkin' what their gowns was like, and what a sight certain parties was; the gentlemen is a-repeatin' of their little jests—they hears nothin'; it's when they're goin' to sleep on an ordinary occasion, and all's quiet, that they hear a footfall on the stairs or a bar let down at a winder. I say, b'lieve me, Jack, I speak as a tough old hand; I've not lived fifty year for nothin'!"

"I suppose not," said Jack, watching the house, and noting, at the same moment that Blueskin drew his tention to them, the appearance of lights in certain of upper chamber windows.

"There you are, my lad," said Blueskin, "goin' to bed; before they've done talkin', we'll have finished the job all comfortable and regular."

And if the reader supposes that there was anything remarkable in a pair of professional house-breakers hanging about their quarry so long as these two seem to have done, it is worth while to recall many a case in which expert thieves had almost lived for days upon the premises they meant to rob; and it is common, even in our own time, for the modern house-breaker to go so far in reckless confidence of his lucky star as to sit down to supper after his work is over, his booty packed, and even be caught at last fast asleep, overcome with his debauch. Nevertheless, Jack maintained from first to last that Blueskin had fixed too early an hour for the attack on The Cedars, at Islington.

"Quiet, my lad," said Blueskin, when presently they commenced operations.

Jack felt the window; it was fastened.

"Shall I cut out a pane?" he asked.

"Steady, Jack, steady," whispered Blueskin. "You're a great hand at breakin' out of prisons; but I'll match you breakin' into houses."

He took from his pocket and carefully unrolled a plaister which he stuck upon a pane nearest the fastening; then tapping it with the butt end of his pistol, it fell noiselessly into his hand. He laid the glass upon the path. "Now, my covey, unfasten the window."

Jack put his hand through the broken pane, unlatched the window, and quietly pushed it open.

"Now, your centre-bit," said Blueskin. Jack at once

set to work on the shutter. "That's our game, my lad."

"There's an oak brace to get through before I can reach the bar."

"Try it lower down," said Blueskin.

Jack tried it lower down.

"The same obstruction," he said.

"Got your watch-spring saw?"

"Yes," said Jack; "but it makes a heap more noise than the centre-bit."

"Don't matter; we're far enough away from the bedchambers. The servants have lighted up in the wing yonder. B'lieve me, my lad, they're all chatterin', and some of 'em's so drunk they wouldn't hear a saw-pit at work."

Jack pocketed his centre-bit, and began to work with his thin and pliable saw, one of the most useful little tools for delicate work, the very tool he had been to search for at Wych Street not so many hours previously, when he vowed to Ellaline that after to-night's job, which he could not avoid, he would turn over a new leaf.

"Take it easy, captain," said Blueskin, as Jack gradually cut through the oak brace of the shutters and proceeded to work round the spot once more with his centre-bit. "Easy does it, my lad. Old Wood is a-laughin' over his old jokes, Mother Wood is busy a-combin' out her hair, the servants is a——"

"Stow it, Blue'," said Jack, "and damn the servants!"

"As you please, my noble captain," said Blueskin, with a chuckle, as Jack, in his own clever way and without the intervention of a plaister, drew out a circular piece of shutter-brace, and putting in his hand, lifted up the inner bar, drew it also from the window, pushed back the shutters, and stooping to avoid the top sash of the

window, entered the room; whispering, as he disappeared, "Come along, old baggage-man," a term common among thieves for "the man who carries off the booty."

CHAPTER XXVI

ERIC BERYL'S ESCAPE

GRUNSTEIN'S confession to Wild was an honest one. Eric Beryl had escaped from the sloop through the machinations of Edgeworth Bess and Mistress Cooke. He took credit to himself for having come straightway to Wild with the unhappy news. Wild had stormed and threatened, and Grunstein had bidden him do his worst. At the same time he pleaded the beauty of the two women, his previous services, and his hitherto successful command. Wild, as we have seen, had at once secured Bess and Cooke, and furthermore, had not only dispatched emissaries to the "Black Lion" and the "Cross Shovels," but had sent out skirmishers in the direction of The Cedars, at Islington. There were other spies on the watch, and not alone Wild's men, but the City Marshal's, added to Eric's fears of recapture; for he had made shrewd observations of the highways and by-ways, more particularly as he approached Islington. Bess was sincere when she gave Wild the "Shovels" and the "Black Lion" as the lad's most probable retreats; but Eric, from the first moment that he touched the shore, had resolved to make for The Cedars. It seemed to him that the road was thick with spies. Conscious of being continually shadowed, he hid himself behind haystacks, under hedges, and in plantations, away from beaten tracks.

The City Marshal's men were after an entirely different quarry. Eric seemed to get clear of them only when he crept through the hedge nearest the little park-like domain of his friends, the Woods. He was ragged, and without a jerkin. Wading through the mud and water of the beach near Greenwich on the previous night, he had made his way on foot, and without venturing to seek food or shelter, except once; and then at what he considered such fearful risk of discovery, that he determined to trust himself no further outside the meadows and the seclusion of woods. Now and then, however, he crept to the highways, and examined a milestone or guidepost. He carried in his belt an unsheathed knife that Mistress Cooke had given him, and he resolved to defend himself to the last. His mind had almost given way under the harsh treatment he had received, and with the fear of death continually before him. Had it not been for messages from Jack, conveyed to him in mysterious ways, urging him to hope, he would probably have fallen a victim to despair and laid violent hands upon himself. Jack had more than once thought of going before a magistrate and making a charge against Wild, on account of Eric, but was judiciously dissuaded by Blueskin, who knew well enough that the result could only be disastrous to both of them; for Wild was at that time all-powerful, and Quilt had informed Jack, for the lad's comfort, that it no longer answered Wild's purpose to murder Eric.

But, in spite of proofs to the contrary, Jack doubted Quilt, though Blueskin was of opinion that Sir Patrick Brent was Eric's chief enemy, and that it was a game between Brent and Wild for the booty that would come to Brent, Eric being really dead. Wild might want more than Brent was willing to concede; and Wild had so wormed his way into Brent's secrets and had pos-

sessed himself of such information, and probably held documents that made him absolutely necessary to Brent. It was idle for Jack to dream that he could do anything openly against two such men, Jack being liable at any moment to be laid by the heels on many charges of felony, any one of which would bring him to the gallows.

And so it happened, that almost at the moment of the entry of the two burglars into the dining-room of Master Owen Wood, Eric Beryl, torn alike with the thorns of the hedges and the fearful memories of a bitter captivity, appeared on the terrace of The Cedars. What should he do? He was conscious of more than one shadowy figure near by, when he was startled by a sudden light in the room, and then a careful closing of the shutters. He crept beneath the window and watched. Presently he saw men coming cautiously out of the darkness into the dim patch of light that marked the green of the terrace in contrast with the blackness of the shadows of the trees and shrubs.

CHAPTER XXVII

ELLAINE WOOD AND SHEPPARD MEET AGAIN.

SH-SH-SH !" hissed Blueskin, unconscious of the fugitive outside, and unsuspecting of the treachery of Wild, as he flashed his dark-lantern upon the room (the gleam of light that had attracted Eric) and closed the shutters. "Didn't I tell you? Don't you hear voices? It's the family a-discussin' the party; they'll never hear us."

"Hope not," said Jack; and as Blueskin stumbled

over a wine-cooler, "I wouldn't try to wake them, if I was you."

"Damn the thing!" growled Blueskin; "better light the candles."

He applied a wooden spill to the lantern-light, and the candelabra was quickly illuminated.

"A cabinet in the corner by the fireplace, and behind it a strong box," said Jack, examining the furniture, and almost immediately commencing an attack upon the bureau.

"Easy, Jack," said Blueskin, pouring out two glasses of wine, "wet your whistle," and emptying a couple of glasses, one after the other; remarking, after the second one, "nectar, my boy."

"Nectar be jiggered! Business, Blue'," Jack replied, hard at work on the lock of the bureau. "We're not here to fool about, and get drunk."

"I will say, Jack, when you get to work you're as steady as a Thames lugger in a calm."

While Jack was opening the cabinet, Blueskin loosened the bag at his waist and filled it with such articles of silver as he fancied, remarking as he did so, "Oh, the carelessness of servants!" an observation that was soon afterwards repeated by an unexpected intruder.

"Don't bungle, my covey," Blueskin paused to say to Jack, who did not seem as expert as usual in the opinion of his pal.

"Bungle, curse you! Whenever have I bungled? Bring your light."

The cabinet was open, and Blueskin turned his lantern upon it.

"An inner drawer; and locked too!" said Jack. "Stand by, hold the light;" and almost as he said so, the bolt turned as easily as if the skeleton had been its most familiar key.

"There you are!" said Jack, hauling out a handful of jewels, a quantity of scrip, and several little bags of gold, of which Blueskin took rapid possession.

With dexterous care Jack opened various secret drawers, but there was no packet of papers. Then, pulling the cabinet aside, he fell to upon the iron dower-chest. The cabinet was placed partly in and partly out of a recess, so as to preclude the idea of anything being stowed behind it.

"Leave the lantern," said Jack; "there's plenty of light on the table for your work;" which there was, and heartily Blueskin went at it.

The servants had not thought it necessary to remove the plate, and Blueskin had soon possessed himself of most of the service that Wild had spoken of. As he planted the last piece Jack came to the table with a packet, and, contrary to all honest practice, proceeded to open it.

"Damme, captain, you must not do that; it ain't in the contract. Wild trusts us, and gives us all we can carry, except that."

Jack paid no attention to his comrade, but broke the seals, cut the ribbon, and unfolded the first paper that fell out; reading with difficulty, "Mems and Notes—Concerning the Death of Sir Martin Waller, supposed to be the father of my apprentice, whom I christened Eric Beryl."

He was in the act of unfolding another document that was weighted with seals and was a parchment, when the marauders were disturbed by a decided noise at the door. Blueskin put forth his hand to take the packet; but Jack, hastily tying the papers together, thrust it deep into a pocket in the breast of his jerkin, and crept behind the cabinet. Blueskin crouched by the window, hiding himself with the curtains.

"Oh, the carelessness of servants!" said Ellaline Wood, pausing in the doorway, a small candle-lamp in her hand.

Blueskin almost chuckled as he heard his own words repeated; but he inwardly cursed himself for not putting out the lights when he came to his hiding-place.

Jack could see the girl's sweet, inquiring face. She had not changed her dress since supper. It was a light brocaded silk, the bodice low, the brown curls of her hair falling negligently about her temples.

She entered the room timidly, and spoke as if she were afraid and found protection in the sound of her voice, as lads whistle at nightfall when hurrying through a churchyard.

"The candles have never been put out; and yet every servant is abed. I will ring them up. First, let me find my book. I begged Mistress Thorpe to let me have it, because it belonged to Jack. What did I do with it? If my mother found it, I should never hear the last of it. And I meant to read it in bed. Oh, yes, I know; I must have placed it on the cabinet when I locked up my necklace."

She went towards the bureau.

"Why—it's open!" she said, in a fearful voice; "and the things are all scattered about!—and—yes, the window is open, too,—though the curtains are drawn. Oh! I'm frightened!"

She screamed, but only once. Blueskin's left hand was over her mouth, his right arm about her waist. "Keep quiet, for your life!" he commanded, in a hoarse whisper.

"Release her!" exclaimed Jack, rushing to her rescue. "Have no fear, Ellaline. Let her go!"

"No, by God, I won't!"

"By Heavens, you will!" said Jack, striking Blueskin upon the face.

"You brute," said Blueskin, staggering, but sufficiently alert to put on his mask, which he kept ready with a ribbon fastened to his cravat.

"Jack Sheppard!" said Ellaline, in a tone of pity and amazement that was heart-breaking.

"One word—don't think too hard of me."

"Oh, Jack! To rob my father's house, and my home! And after what you said this morning!"

"I'm a scamp, and don't deserve your pity; but I'm here as much in the interest of Eric Beryl as my own. His safety is the pledge of this night's work."

Blueskin, placing his bag of booty outside the window, now rushed upon Jack and seized him with a grip of iron.

"Come away, you milksop, or I'll blow the wench's brains out!" and he dragged his companion to the window, Jack gasping in broken whispers, "Goodbye, Ellaline! Curse me—denounce me—give me up to justice!"

As the two disappeared, she stretched out her arms, crying hysterically, "Oh, Jack! And I loved you! . . ."

She had only just staggered to a chair, when her father, with several servants, entered the room; Wood with a blunderbuss, one servant armed with a sword, another with a poker. They were followed by Mistress Wood, in an elaborate dressing-gown, attended by two trembling maid-servants, and supported by a male guest, who carried a pair of heavy pistols.

It was an unexpectedly busy scene for all concerned; for, as Wood and the family servants rushed to the rescue of Ellaline, a scuffle was heard outside the window and a voice, shouting, "You are my prisoner—in the name of the law!"

The next moment Blueskin and Jack were thrust back into the room, Blueskin very angry and without his mask, Jack calmly defiant. The window was filled with the faces of the City Marshal and his men. He had been

unable to restrain his ardour into waiting for Jack and Blueskin at the "Black Lion." Moreover, he had doubted whether Wild had not some sinister design to make things unsuccessful for him there; so he had resolved to take his enemies red-handed, and he had pressed into his service quite a posse of constables.

"Your servant, Master Wood," said Blueskin, with a quick-witted perception of the possibility of turning the tables upon the City Marshal, and taking the opportunity to edge up to Ellaline with an appeal for her own ear, while Hichen was getting the remainder of his men through the window, "Help us, dear mistress, or we are lost; support what I say, and save Jack Sheppard from the gallows."

"In the name of the law!" said Hichen.

"You said that before," said Blueskin. "And I make answer 'In the name of the King!'"

"You are the master of this house?" said Hichen, addressing Wood. "I arrest these villains on the charge of burglariously entering and purloining your property, and——"

"What!" exclaimed Blueskin. "Why, we was invited here, we are guests of the young lady; and if it comes to purloining, what have you done with the bag of stuff you just now planted outside the window?"

"Silence, you ruffian!" exclaimed Hichen. "Men, prepare to fire upon him at the word of command!"

"What is the meaning of this, my dear?" inquired Wood.

"I asked them to come," said Ellaline.

"You asked them to come here—and at this hour?"

"Yes, father. I thought you would be angry, so I asked them to come late; it was in the cause of——"

"Justice and Eric Beryl," said Jack, responding to an appealing look from Blueskin.

"It is a lie!" said Hichen.

"It is no lie!" exclaimed Eric Beryl, leaping through the window and standing there on guard, as it were, one hand gripping the curtain, the other a long bare knife. He had been witness to the burglary, seen Jack's capture of the packet, heard his pitiful appeal to Ellaline, and was determined to give him one more chance of life and liberty.

"Eric!" exclaimed Ellaline and Jack together.

"Eric Beryl!" said Wood.

"Yes; though, if my mother lived, even she might doubt me, ragged, starved, miserable as I am. I owe my life to Jack Sheppard and his friends, and I demand his release from these creatures of Jonathan Wild."

"Gentlemen," said Wood, addressing the constables, "I am master of this house, as the City Marshal has reminded me, and I request that you put up your weapons."

"But, Master Wood," said Hichen, in remonstrance.

"There's no more to be said. Put 'em up!" exclaimed Blueskin, suddenly disarming two of the men, while Jack seized the City Marshal's drawn sword, and Wood, as if in self-defence, covered the other officers with his blunderbuss, all the time exclaiming, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, respect the master of the house; let every weapon be laid aside, and we will parley; no harm shall come to any one;" and he was wildly seconded by Mistress Wood, who clung to the arm of Hichen. The stranger-guest and Wood's servants stood to their arms.

The City Marshal was no coward, but he saw plainly enough that if there was to be a fight, he would be the first to fall; so he drew his men aside, though he still continued to assert his authority, and to claim the aid of Master Wood as a citizen and a loyal subject of the King; whereupon Master Joseph Blake, a pistol in either hand

and the very devil in his eye, said, "Look here, Master Wood; this man, Hichen, is a thief!"

Hichen laid his hand on his sword.

"There are published pamphlets that so proclaim him. One of his agents has robbed your house; he came, under the pretence of law and justice, to take the robber; these innocent officers of his of course are honest men and true; they don't know his game; but the lord mayor does; the chief constable does; and you shall see, before another day is over, he will be lodged in the Castle cell of Newgate!"

"You infernal ruffian!" exclaimed Hichen. "But it is not necessary that I take you to-night. I obey the wishes, I may say the armed and forcible commands, of Master Wood, who will explain his conduct to the magistrates, before whom he must appear."

"Sir, I am always at the service of the law, and shall obey the mandate of the King or his representatives; and permit me to say that I thank you for accepting my word for the presence of these gentlemen in my house, and now, I beg you will let them go in peace, and that you will accept of such hospitality I myself, and Mistress Wood, can offer you."

"As you please," said Hichen.

"But what of the plunder, Master Hichen?" said Blueskin.

"He'll restore that to Master Wood," replied Jack, dragging in Blueskin's bag, and pouring most of its contents upon the floor.

Blueskin had to accept the situation with a good grace, and did so.

"That makes amends, Master Hichen," said Blueskin. "We'll not prosecute you; and you will ask no reward for the return of the stolen property."

"And here's something that belongs to you, Eric,"

said Jack. "I think you must have seen me 'speak' with it."

"I saw you take it," said Eric; "I heard you describe it."

"It is a packet of papers that Wild wants; it is a packet of papers that Master Wood has kept concealed; it is a packet of papers that——"

"I had taken out of the bank to restore to you," said Wood; "for Master Wild has promised me your freedom, and had advised me to be prepared with these documents, to assist him in establishing your identity."

"Which you, Eric Beryl, will do well to keep yourself," said Jack, "with all respect to Master Wood. Come along, Master Blake, we shall be late for supper." And they started for the open window.

Two of the officers stepped forward as if to detain them; whereupon Eric Beryl stood between them, his knife gleaming above his head.

"Good-night, Master Beryl," said Blueskin, slipping out into the darkness.

"God bless you, Eric!" said Jack, as he followed Blueskin.

Ellaline had advanced towards the window as the delinquents made their exit.

"Don't weep, Ellaline," said Eric, tenderly. "We will save him yet."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BEGINNING OF A BUSY DAY

ONCE more in Wild's private room; not the stone-parlour, but the room at the back of Jonathan's public offices; the spider's parlour it might be called, for Jona-

than, through a small window, could see the flies as they buzzed into his web from the open street. He sat at his table, and Quilt Arnold stood opposite his chair, as if he had just been called to answer some important questions.

"The door is not shut," said Wild.

Quilt closed the door of communication between the outer offices and the private room, the web and the spider's parlour.

"Thank you," said Wild. "We are going to have a busy day."

"Yes, sir," Quilt humbly answered.

"You don't forget, friend Quilt, that your life is in my hands?"

"I have a good memory, and am grateful," said Quilt, who knew that some special act of self-denial was about to be required at his hands whenever Jonathan Wild reminded him of his unhappy position.

"I hope I am a liberal paymaster?"

"Generosity itself."

"So many have said that to me, with their tongues in their cheeks, Quilt!"

"Not I, Master Wild; and I love the work you give me. The world is my enemy; it was from the first day I was born; you rescued me from its malice."

"Very well, Quilt. We have visitors."

"Longden is in the waiting-room."

"The canting rogue who loads his pistol with a text from Scripture, and brings down his man with a sentiment?"

"The same, Master Wild."

"I like the fellow; but I will not see him. Take his report, and let him go."

Quilt went to the small office-window, and gave a message to an attendant clerk.

"And Willett is here—the South Hill Park business; says you promised him half the value of the plate; he contends that a hundred pounds is not a quarter."

"Where is the plate?"

"Delivered up to Lord Enderslow."

"Tell Willett he shall have half if he gets the plate again. Lord Enderslow and the family leave for the continent next week."

"Very well, sir; I shall tell him."

"Not at the moment; we will get through our list first. See them afterwards," said Wild, consulting a small, handsomely-bound ledger that was open in front of him, and reading several entries before he paused to emphasise any particular record. "Lady Dornton's diamonds?"

"Yes," said Quilt.

"What is the report?"

"His lordship is willing to pay a thousand pounds for them. I said you hoped to secure them within a few days."

"To the account of Master Horton," said Wild, his eyes still bent upon the book.

"Gentleman Horton," said Quilt, with a faint flicker of a smile at the corners of his mouth.

"I could have hanged him and didn't, though he attacked me on the road and played me a vile trick. And yet they say I am a hard master."

"Horton is grateful," said Quilt.

"What was the transaction? I seem to forget."

"Gentleman Horton stopped his lordship's coach at Blackheath."

Wild had not forgotten. He never forgot. But he liked to hear the deeds of his gallants repeated.

"What has he had?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Give him a hundred more, and close the transaction."

"Yes, sir."

"Where are the diamonds now?"

"In the strong box, below the stone-parlour."

"Very well. Arrange an appointment with his lordship to-morrow."

"Yes sir," Quilt answered, making a note upon a small tablet which he held in his hand.

"Have Horton and Mistress Cooke made friends again?"

"I didn't know they had quarrelled."

"Didn't, eh? Well, perhaps it is not a quarrel. Devilish handsome, Mistress Cooke; young too; noble blood in those veins, Quilt, or I'm mistaken."

"Horton, they say, was an Oxford man, and took a degree," Quilt answered.

"We are becoming quite an aristocratic company, Quilt. A youngster of a ducal house, last week ruined at White's, took to the road the next night, and robbed his father's steward of a purse of two hundred guineas. He had lost a thousand guineas. I have lent him five hundred. Who says I am not generous?"

"No one who knows you, Master Wild," said Quilt.

"Yet *you* know I am not, Quilt," said Wild, with a sudden change of tone; "have you never complained that I am a bad paymaster?"

"Never!" said Quilt, stedfastly returning Wild's searching gaze.

"When I die, Quilt, you shall be my heir. I will make my will this very day."

"I would be sorry to benefit by your death, sir."

"You sly fox!" said Wild. "You mean that a gift during life is better than waiting for dead men't shoes."

"I assure you, sir, I had no such thought."

"Quilt, you are either the truest comrade and friend

a trustful chief ever had, or you are the most wary, deep, and masterly conspirator that ever was hanged at Tyburn."

"You are pleased to be humorous," said Quilt, with that faint little smile which he permitted himself now and then. "Mistress Edgeworth Bess is among the callers who are waiting."

"I will see her. Dismiss the others, and close the shutter."

"Yes, sir," said Quilt, closing the shutter that covered the small window whence Wild could see into the outer office, where several clerks were engaged, receiving and posting up reports of robberies and taking a registration fee of five shillings for obtaining the attention of Master Wild and his assistants. There was a smaller office, where a select few of Master Wild's band were received. As a rule, his people kept clear of headquarters. They communicated with their chief through various other channels. Edgeworth Bess, Mistress Cooke, Joseph Blake, Master Horton (who had a smart lodging near St. James's Street), and one or two others paid their respects to Master Wild, and were occasionally entertained.

Wild sat over his ledger for some time before Quilt returned, ushering in Edgeworth Bess.

"You may leave us, Quilt."

Quilt retired behind the screen.

"Not that way, Quilt. I think your chief clerk has business for you."

Quilt went into the front office, closing the door carefully. It clicked as a heavy door clicks, with a suggestion of strength and the impossibility of hearing anything on the other side. There was no key-hole.

"You're a kind friend and patron, ain't you?" said Bess, angrily.

"I hope so," Wild replied, producing his snuff-box.

"You've had Jack arrested, and they've chained him to the floor."

Wild took a pinch of snuff, and brushed the lapel of his coat with an ample figured-silk pocket-handkerchief.

"I might have chained you and Mistress Cooke to the floor, but I didn't. You deserved to be done to death down in that vault the other night. Yet you supped off the best, and you owned that you never drank finer canary."

"That's another story," said Bess; "and you thanked me and Poll for what we'd done, and said you wanted the lad, Beryl, free; didn't you?"

"I said what I meant."

"Very well; then we can cry quits on that. But you have Jack Sheppard by the leg."

"And I'll have him by the neck, as sure as his name's Sheppard," said Wild, with a snap of his hard mouth.

"You will!" exclaimed Bess, her eyes blazing with anger. "Then as sure as your name's Wild, I'll put you in the same cart to Tyburn!"

"What!" exclaimed Wild, leaning back in his chair, his eyes for a moment sparkling with something approaching to an amused smile. "You really love the lad? What a world it is—what a world! And I thought you were my own particular sprite, my favourite spy, my very eyes and hands, at my beck and call even unto death. And you fall in love and threaten me!"

He rose to his feet, and leaned against Quilt's tall desk contemplating her.

"None of your flatteries and poetry to me, Master Wild! I've had enough of that. You've jugged me before now, not only in your own damnable den, but in Newgate itself, and it needed Jack to set me free; and

then you said it was all part of our business.* Never again, Master Wild. Don't look at me like that. Do you think Jack's my only friend?"

"I will not be so complimentary to Jack," Wild replied, with a satirical laugh.

"Oh, I know your cold-steel ways. But I'm not afraid of you. Why do you hate the lad, who has served you so faithfully?"

"He has not served me faithfully," said Wild, angrily. "He is a traitor; broke his very last engagement with me, a contract sworn on oath; purloined documents that were mine, blabbed my secrets, abused my confidence, defied me, and made a treaty with the basest ingrate of all, Blueskin."

"Has he?" Bess replied, her handsome face almost ugly with passion. "Then beware! I come here to give you warning. If you don't set Jack free, or give him the means of escape, I'll have your throat cut, so help me Heaven!"

"Termagant!" hissed Wild, rushing upon her and seizing her by the wrists. "Vixen—strumpet—faithless! I'll have you flayed alive!"

The woman cowered at his feet, and shrieked with pain. For a minute he held her wrists as in a vice. It

* For a time after he left Wych Street, in the very earliest days of his career, Jack worked as a journeyman carpenter, with a view to the easier commission of robbery; and being employed to assist in repairing the house of a gentleman in Mayfair, he took an opportunity of carrying off a sum of money, a quantity of plate, some gold rings, and four suits of clothes. Not long after this, Edgeworth Bess was apprehended and lodged in the roundhouse of St. Giles's, where Sheppard went to visit her; but the beadle refusing to admit him, Jack knocked him down, broke open the door, and carried her off in triumph; an exploit which acquired him a high degree of credit among his companions.—*Chronicles of Crime*, 1886.

seemed to her as if her very bones cracked before he flung her prone upon the floor.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, crouching in the corner, whither he had flung her. "What a devil, what a fiend!"

"Quilt!" said Wild, tapping upon the closed shutter, and then sitting calmly at his desk.

"Yes, sir," said Quilt, entering as if he had only waited outside to be summoned at any moment.

"Mistress Edgeworth Bess is not well. Moreover, she is very anxious as touching the position of Sheppard. They have chained him to the floor in the Castle cell of Newgate. Give Bess a file, a gimlet, and one of Sheppard's own chisels, and a skeleton key or two."

"Yes, sir."

Bess, as if fascinated, gradually rose to her feet, her eyes fixed wonderingly upon Wild.

"And obtain her an order to see Jack Sheppard."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, your pardon, Master Wild!" wailed Bess; "your pardon, sir!"

"And ask the jailer's good offices for her."

"Yes, Master Wild, said Quilt.

"Stay. A written message from me may be of service, considering how shrewdly they are guarding their prisoner."

"Yes, sir," said Quilt; and Bess looked on, with a world of gratitude in her tearful eyes, as Wild wrote, "Do all this, but at the same time warn Austin that Sheppard means to escape; bid him have every visitor strictly searched."

He gave the paper to Quilt, saying, "Read it, Quilt, and do your best."

Quilt read the paper.

"I wish to befriend her," said Wild.

"Oh, Master Wild, forgive me! Thank you, sir; thank you."

"This way, Mistress Edgeworth Bess," said Quilt, and he opened the door for her. She backed out, keeping her face to Wild and repeating her thanks.

As the latch of the door clicked upon them, Wild sat him down, thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, stretched his legs beneath the table, smiled grimly, and meditated.

"It is not through her pocket," he said to himself, "that you capture a woman. They have hearts, these strange creatures. I can't afford to lose Bess. What a vixen! What an eye! Damn the fellow; I almost envy him."

Then he opened a drawer, and turned over some papers in the Beryl, Wood, and Brent case.

"A brave lad, this Beryl. I'm told Mistress Cooke wants to die for him, just as Bess would be willing to die for Sheppard! Well, there are women who have died for me!" He laughed to himself. "For me. . . . You either lead a woman in a string, or she leads you. In my business there are seasons when it is a question which of you shall carry on the trade. . . . Yes, Master Eric Beryl's a brave youngster. What a fool they made of Hichen! A wise thing he did nothing in the matter; for his own sake; also for mine. I need him once more, and then——. . . . Whatever happens, I have done well out of the Brent business. Sir Patrick has bled freely; he had to. His Jacobite friends little dream that most of their money has come into my coffers. . . . Wood is liberal, and has plenty. Sir Patrick's is the empty purse that's of no value even for the setting. . . . But Sheppard! By all I hold that's worth a thought, I'll hang him. . . . And Master Blake, you shall be Blueskin indeed, before I have done with you!"

A tap at the door, and Quilt returned.

"Master Owen Wood, and the young gentleman, Eric Beryl, sir."

"Show them in, Quilt."

"Yes, sir."

"One moment, Quilt! How did you leave Bess?"

"Quite reconciled, sir, quite."

"Very well. Show in my friend, Master Wood, and his *protégé*."

CHAPTER XXIX

JONATHAN WILD DISCOURSES ON HYPOCRISY TO WOOD AND ERIC BERYL

"YOUR servant, gentlemen," said Wild, rising to receive his two visitors; Eric pale and thin, but no longer ragged or forlorn in attire; Wood fussy as usual, with his ample bushy wig, his cocked hat, and buckled shoes. "I am beholden to you."

"And we to you, I hope, Master Wild," replied Wood.

"'Tis long since we met," said Wild, addressing Eric.

"Yes," was the laconic reply of the young man, who stood stiffly apart, as if he were only a mere spectator of an interview which had been sought by his friend, Master Wood, and in which he did not wish to share.

"Let the gentlemen be seated, Quilt," said Wild.

Quilt placed chairs for them, and then quietly left the room.

"And now to business, Master Wild," said Wood. "You are good enough to say you hold the last links in

the chain of evidence that will substantiate Master Eric Beryl's claim to the Brent and Waller estates."

"You have already received a surety to that effect."

"The register of your mother's marriage with Sir Martin Waller," said Wood, turning to Eric, "for which I paid Master Wild."

"Most handsomely," said Wild; and it is worth while to mention, in passing, that this was one of the documents that was removed from the lodging of Sir Patrick Brent, at Brentfield, on the occasion of a certain excursion, when he encountered the late Tom Reynolds.

"I was too poor at that time to obtain your good offices," remarked Eric.

"Much too poor, Master Beryl," said Wild; "and I had a retainer on the other side."

"From Sir Patrick Brent?"

"The same," Wild replied; adding, with a fine show of virtuous indignation, his opinion of Master Beryl's blood relation, "a hypocrite, sir, and worse. I hate hypocrisy. It is a blacker sin than ingratitude. The truth is, Master Beryl, I can bring about the immediate fulfilment of your mother's will, give you a name and fortune—the collection of the necessary evidence and papers has been a work of years—with every other legal aid necessary to the case, for a sum already named to Master Wood, according to this short agreement." He took from a drawer a paper, which he laid out before him. "Or I can baffle you—make the documents over to Sir Patrick Brent, and nothing would then shake his succession; or I can produce a claimant—yes, sir, a claimant your own age, and backed with such evidence as could hardly fail of success."

"And you threaten that!" said Beryl, indignantly.

"I make no threat," Wild replied. "I am simply stating possibilities. But come, let us be friends. Great

nations go to war with each other, cut the throats of thousands, and then make peace and love each other. We are only individuals. Let us show that we are sensible individuals."

"For months," retorted Eric, "you made my life a hell upon earth; chained me, starved me, kept me in the fear of death, almost made me wish for it. Had it not been for Jack Sheppard and his comrades, I should long since have been at the bottom of the North Sea."

"My dear young friend, we are both the victims of a conspiracy; Sir Patrick Brent was your enemy, not I. Grunstein was his ally; but Sir Patrick was not powerful enough to compass your death, though he made your life uncomfortable. As for Sheppard, surely he showed his hand at Islington, the ingrate. His master's house nor his master's goods were sacred to him. His chief desire was to obtain documents belonging to Master Wood and yourself . . ."

"Which he rescued from your possession," said Beryl.

"From my possession!" said Wild, with a scornful shrug of his shoulders. "From Master Wood's."

"By your commands, and on the condition that——"

"Nay, nay," interrupted Wood, now stepping between Wild and Beryl, "let us have no further controversy. There are so many sides to the questions between us, the evidence is so contradictory and so tainted, that it were best to confine ourselves to achievements rather than to theories, and that we let the past go. Furthermore, my dear Eric, you promised to be guided by me."

"And so I will," said Eric, restraining his anger.

"Then sign this document," said Wild. "It acknowledges certain services and the receipt of certain documents, in addition to the register in question; letters of your mother, private notes of Sir Patrick, and

other papers which I have had the good fortune to procure for Master Wood on your behalf."

"Sign it, Eric," said Wood.

Eric advanced, took the pen that Wild offered him, and signed.

"And here, Master Wood, is the duplicate, duly executed by me," said Wild; adding, "by the way, it acknowledges also the payment of two thousand pounds on account, the balance on delivery of the remainder of the documents to-morrow."

It may here be stated, for the reader's information, though he will probably already have understood the situation, that the balance of documents represented the Ferrish packet, not yet in Wild's possession, and certain other papers which Wild was holding back. The Ferrish packet he hoped to make good by an affidavit, setting forth Ferrish's confession and describing the documents, though, from various suggestions offered from time to time by Quilt, he still hoped that the originals might be found.

"I have brought the money; we are both business men," said Wood, handing Wild a bundle of notes. "And now we will say goodbye, until we meet to complete the business. But, before we take our leave, one word about Jack Sheppard. If we undertook to use our influence, by way of placing him beyond temptation, could not his release be obtained?"

"My dear sir, he is not without friends. A rescue is even talked of."

"A rescue?"

"On the way to Tyburn."

"'Twould be a bold adventure."

"Bold as futile. Forewarned is forearmed."

"Is there no hope?" Beryl asked.

"None," said Wild.

CHAPTER XXX

A COMPACT WITH QUILT ARNOLD

QUILT'S art of dissimulation was one of affected innocence and frankness. It was some little time before he answered Wild's summons, after the departure of Wood and Beryl.

"What has detained you?" asked Wild.

"A conference with Master Wood and the young man. They have heard of a design to rescue Sheppard."

"From me?" asked Wild.

"And from Master Blake."

"Well?"

"To-morrow night is the festival of the Minters, at the 'Cross Shovels.' Friends of Sheppard are to meet there, and the subject will be discussed. Master Wood desires to be a guest on the occasion, not alone to lend any aid and comfort in his power, but to accompany his daughter."

"To accompany his daughter to the 'Cross Shovels!'" said Wild, with real astonishment.

"She is bent on seeing the woman who declares she is Sheppard's wife, and giving countenance to any effort that is to be made to secure Sheppard's liberty."

"You amaze me, Quilt; and I am not easily surprised."

"And I thought it well, with your approval, to offer my services, to accompany them to the 'Cross Shovels' and give them the protection of my knowledge and assistance," said Quilt.

"Good, very good."

"I am to meet Master Wood privately at Alderman

Whetton's, where his daughter is now staying, and where they will remain overnight as the alderman's guests. Master Whetton, it seems, is an old friend of Master Wood's."

"But they don't like us at the 'Shovels,' Quilt?"

"They naturally fear you, sir; but I shall contribute a sum to the Minters' treasury, at the cost of Master Wood, and can easily make my peace with them."

"Quilt," said Jonathan, with a wave of his hand, "Jonathan Wild takes his hat off to you, and when he needs a successor, he shall pass the sceptre on to his shrewd lieutenant."

Quilt almost smiled as he said, "Oh, sir!"

"And now, Quilt, your close attention. If I reminded you of your obligations to me a little while ago, it was to put your devotion to another test, and at the same time to set you free."

"To set me free?"

"From any possibility of a prosecution for a crime that is punishable with death."

Quilt made no answer.

"At dusk I have an appointment with Sir Patrick Brent, after office hours. You will see the offices are closed and the course clear for a strictly private interview. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sir Patrick has a quarrel with me; you have a quarrel with him. It was he who supplied me with the evidence against you."

This was untrue, but Wild had on more than one occasion by hints and innuendoes led up to the present revelation.

"Sir Patrick Brent?" said Quilt, in a tone of inquiry and surprise.

"Sir Patrick Brent," said Wild emphatically.

"Strange that I should have suspected him."

"You did, in very truth?"

"Yes."

"Then suspect him no longer," said Wild, flinging upon the table a pocket-book stuffed with documents. "Open it, Quilt, open it. That book contains your death warrant, or your freedom."

Quilt opened the pocket-book with trembling hands, while Jonathan told him its apocryphal story. A resourceful scoundrel, he was never at a loss in the manufacture of useful evidence, and there was often a touch of romance in his inventions.

"The pocket-book and documents belonged to the comrade of the forger, Knott, who was hanged. This man, Knott, was a Jacobite spy. Brent is a Jacobite conspirator at the present moment. He and the spy were on intimate terms. The spy thought the pocket-book and papers more of a political than a criminal find. He was a fool. Brent hated you from the first day you met. He considered it an act of Providence that you should thus have been delivered into his hands. I bought the documents from him."

"Curse him!" said Quilt.

If Wild had told the truth, Brent's name would not have been heard of in the transaction. It was from Hichen that Wild bought the papers. Hichen had them from Knott, on the understanding that he would destroy them. The wretch explained that, although Quilt's letters and a bill drawn in his hand might easily convict him as an accomplice, he was perfectly innocent. Hichen made the pocket-book over to Wild, and thus Quilt had become his slave.

Quilt turned over the papers with a beating heart. His pale face flushed, and paled again, as he recognised them, at the import Wild had given to certain of his letters and

the ready-made bill of exchange. The body of this document was in his writing, and the half-finished signature of the acceptor in that of a penman who had evidently been practising the very autograph for the forgery of which the owner of the book had been convicted and hanged. Wild had, on two special occasions, referred to the nature of this evidence against Quilt; and, although the latter had honest explanations to offer, he was experienced enough to see that he would have had little chance of escaping the charge of being accessory to Knott's offence.

"I was innocent, Master Wild," he said, folding up the documents and replacing them in the book.

"You would have been hanged, all the same."

"I do not doubt it," replied Quilt.

"Take your life, Quilt; the pocket-book is yours."

"I am very grateful," said Quilt, thrusting the book deep down into his deepest pocket.

"The fact that you are free from his malice will not make you hate Sir Patrick Brent the less?"

"I already had good reason against him," said Quilt; "once, when I denied him to you, he struck me with his cane."

"Lucky he had not stabbed you; it would not have been his first murder."

"As well I know, sir."

"Those papers, that pocket-book, are yours. After this night's work, you are my partner, without conditions, and with no sword of Damocles hanging over your devoted head."

"Thank you, Master Wild, thank you," said Quilt, wondering what new service Wild required and how Brent could have any connection with it.

"You are speculating upon the return I expect from this act of comradeship? Later, I am going to have

dinner with my young friend, the heir to a dukedom. I shall return before dusk; when we shall make our dispositions for the reception of Sir Patrick Brent."

Wild did not dine with his aristocratic recruit. He went straightway to the City Marshal, who received him curtly, not to say with anger. They had been on bad terms with each other every hour since the affair at Islington. Indeed, Hichen was like to lose his place, through secret intimation of his delinquencies, made by one who evidently knew a great deal of the evil doings of the trusted official. It had, indeed, already been intimated to Hichen that he might consult his own interests if he resigned his position. His intimacy with Jonathan Wild, it was said, was more for his own aggrandisement than for the good of the city. Hichen had resolved to die hard officially, if he had to go; and it was his full intention to pull down to the very gutter his quondam associate. At the time Wild called upon him, he was engaged in writing an attack upon the thief-taker, exposing his criminal methods, naming many transactions in which Wild had cheated not only the private citizen but the State, and denouncing him in no measured terms. It was not to be expected, therefore, that Wild would find him ready to consider his latest scheme for using him and his office. No, he said, he was not prepared at present to listen to any proposals, and he begged Master Wild to keep his affairs to himself until he should hear further; a line of treatment that only made Wild the more determined to bring off his great *coup*, which was to kill Brent and obtain from the State credit for a glorious deed; which being accomplished, Wild contemplated retiring to some continental city, there to enjoy a quiet life for the remainder of his days, or enter upon a new line of activity, whichever should commend itself to a man of wealth and accomplishments.

It is a coincidence, of which the historian may take cognizance, that Jack Sheppard had resolved to quit the country after the Islington expedition ; but the cleverest rogue or the keenest diplomatist does not always realise plans that in perspective often seem easier of accomplishment than many difficult ones that he has carried with barely an effort.

Baulked by the City Marshal, Wild went boldly before the Lord Mayor and swore an information against Sir Patrick Brent, who, he alleged, had threatened his life. He promised during the day to inform the chief constable where Brent might be arrested. Then, directing his coachman to drive to St. James's Palace, he found no difficulty in obtaining an interview with a high official with whom he had had many conferences of a political nature. Jonathan had proved himself useful to the Government in dealing with Jacobite plots, and the officer in question was delighted to have something like bonâ fide evidence against Sir Patrick Brent, with which Wild supplied him, in the shape of documents and notes of transactions within Wild's own observation. Sir Patrick had long been suspected, but had hitherto kept clear of anything like convincing testimony of active disloyalty. From the very first day of his alliance with Brent, Wild had directed his best efforts to secure evidence against Sir Patrick of conspiracy to overthrow the existing dynasty and restore the Young Pretender, the unhappy son of the weak and cowardly James. Asking that the Minister would take careful note of the service he was rendering to the State, Wild undertook to deliver Brent to the Government at his office in the Old Bailey that very night, even at the risk of his life.

CHAPTER XXXI

MURDERED WITH THE "WEAPON OF A GENTLEMAN."

"AND now, Quilt," said Wild, when the hour of Brent's arrival was at hand and the candles in their sconces were lighted in the private office, that was decorated as we have seen, with a portrait of Judge Jeffreys and many examples of criminal trophies, "and now, my friend, as soon as you hear Brent at the outer door, admit him straight."

"Yes, Master Wild."

"He will pick a quarrel with me. He will suppose you have left the room. You will have deceived him. You will be close at hand, your weapon ready."

"At your command," said Quilt, his hand upon his pistol.

"No, no; a sword, Quilt. It will be a duel to the death."

Wild drew his own weapon, and struck an attitude.

"I am not vain, Quilt," he continued, "but the sword is the weapon of the gentleman, and Monsieur Dellile was my master. You remember my bout with Captain Woodford?"

"I shall never forget it."

"He has forgotten it long ago."

"You gave him a great funeral, Master Wild."

"It was the only reparation I could make to his widow. Show me your weapon, Quilt."

Quilt drew his sword. Wild took it, felt its point, made it fairly whistle in a few skilful passages against an imaginary foe, and returned it.

"A good weapon, Quilt. No, no, do not sheathe it.

Sir Patrick will be impetuous. I hope to be cool. Sometimes an impetuous and passionate man overmasters even the wiliest fencer. Let us be on the safe side, Quilt. If I am hard pressed, I will cry 'Have at you, vile Jacobite!' Then you will run him through, Quilt—you will kill him, Quilt!"

"Never fear, sir."

"I place my life in your hands, Quilt," said Wild, fixing his eyes upon him.

Quilt bore the test; though, for a moment, it passed through his mind to question which of the two men dead would be most to his advantage.

"Whatever happens, I have made the finish a safe thing, as you shall see; and I have no fear that I shall do his business for him. When this day is over, Quilt, you will not only be a free man, free to come or go, free to be my partner or an independent citizen, with two thousand pounds in your pocket—and that, with what you have saved—eh? . . . Quilt! He has rung the outer bell."

A faint sound was heard. Quilt hurried into the outer office, and doors were unlocked. A minute or two later Quilt returned, ushering in Sir Patrick Brent, who was dressed in riding costume.

"You are punctual, Sir Patrick," said Wild.

"It is the only virtue you appreciate," the other replied.

"You do not know me," said Wild; who thereupon turned to Quilt and intimated that he might leave the room, adding, "I shall not require your services again to-night."

"Thank you, Master Wild," said Quilt, passing behind the screen and banging the door as if he had left the room, but hiding behind the screen, and laying hold upon his naked weapon.

"You will excuse me, I'm sure, Sir Patrick, but I like to humour industry and requite it. Quilt generally goes to his club on Tuesdays."

"I have no patience left for discussing the peculiarities of Quilt," said Sir Patrick.

"I fear you have an antipathy for poor Quilt."

"Damn Quilt!" said Sir Patrick.

"I will do nothing of the kind, Sir Patrick. Quilt is not only my servant, but my friend, my comrade. Pray be seated."

"I can stand."

"As you please."

"You are deceiving me, Wild."

"Indeed! I had imagined that you were deceiving me. If it be not so, what is the meaning of your interviews with Owen Wood?"

"To verify your intrigue against me—against me, your friend and comrade, more to you than a mere spy, such as Quilt Arnold, whom you condescend to call friend."

"You no longer trust me," said Wild.

"Have I not kept every engagement with you? Paid you to the uttermost farthing every demand you have made upon me? Have I not impoverished myself to enrich you, leaving my reward to the future, while you secured yours in the present?"

"I do not desire to gainsay you."

"And all the time you knew this Eric Beryl lived! He was aboard your sloop, making voyages, and in your custody when you gave me assurance of his death; and even now you are making terms with Wood and with the young man himself, for papers burglariously carried off from Brentfield, and your own and Ferrish's evidence that are to prove the heirship to property that——"

"Your father and sister both thought you unworthy to

succeed to! There, don't be angry. A lie, with a bit of truth in it, is often stronger than the truth itself. Something of what you say is not without foundation. I have been shamefully deceived by my own people. The lad Sheppard and his hoary comrade, Blueskin, are leagued together against me. They corrupted the master of my sloop. Their women helped the conspiracy; and they possess, even now, papers that are of the gravest importance in our case. It is with us, at this moment, plot and counterplot."

"You lie, Wild, you lie!" exclaimed Brent. "You have the papers. I supped with Wood the other night, and had the felicity of an interview with his daughter. They unmasked you, Jonathan Wild; they unmasked you!"

"If you were not my client," said Wild, rising to his feet, "I should know how to resent the insult you have offered me."

"Your client, be damned, Wild! Your dupe, you mean—your dupe, sir! And if you have a mind to a bit of sword practice, I'm your man, sir. "Damme, when first we met you boasted of your prowess!"

"Do you come here to murder me as you murdered Sir Thomas Waller?" said Wild, his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"Coward! Liar! Thief! Defend yourself!" was Brent's prompt and energetic reply; and the two men faced each other.

The fight began without further parley. Wild cleverly parried Brent's first thrust. Brent gave him no time to pause or show off. He was desperately and passionately in earnest. He rushed upon his man with murderous intent. Wild watched him with the keenness of a fox, gave way when necessary, made the running when he could; forcing Brent, when possible, towards the screen,

where he could see Quilt's white face, and his sword ready.

They paused for a moment, as by mutual consent. Wild thrust a chair aside with his foot. Brent stood with his back to the table. When they fell to again, Wild was bleeding. It was only a flesh wound, but it was conspicuous and the blood trickled down his cheek. A wound would have stimulated some men to extra effort; it only seemed to steady Wild, who fenced with a calm dexterity that irritated Brent, who had his sword almost twisted out of his hand at one moment and flashing sparks the next, as Wild seemed to play with it, seeking for a vulnerable opening. Presently, however, Brent appeared to be tiring his adversary, and remarking, "Damme! you are trifling with me," he lunged at him ferociously. Wild, avoiding a desperate head cut, exclaimed, "Vile Jacobite, then have at you!" At which moment two remarkable things happened.

Brent was suddenly conscious of a second adversary, and there was a loud knocking at the outer door. Brent, in some bewilderment, fought on. The door of the room was now assailed, with cries of "Open, in the name of the King!" Quilt, instead of running Brent through, had slipped as he went for him, and narrowly escaped with his life, for Brent had immediately realised that he had a second man to deal with. "Traitor!" he hissed, as he lunged at Wild; "coward!" as he almost disarmed Quilt. His back to the wall, he now took both points of the opposing swords on his own, with marvellous dexterity. "In the King's name!" shouted the officer at the door, his men beating upon it with the butt-ends of their matchlocks. "Help!" shouted Wild, "help!—break in the door!" purposely for the moment prolonging the combat. Brent, with an ugly gash over the eyes that blinded him, struck out wildly, was pinked

by Quilt, and wounded to the death by Wild. As their victim fell, with a heavy sigh, the door gave way to the assault of the soldiers.

"In the name of the King!" said the captain. "I hold a warrant for the arrest of Sir Patrick Brent for high treason."

"You take him red-handed," said Wild, staggering against the wall and mopping the blood from his face. "He would have murdered me; but for the timely assistance of my friend I should at this moment be a dead man!"

"Is this he?" asked the captain, stooping over the prostrate swordsman.

"All that's left of the traitor," said Wild, putting up his sword, Quilt standing by, pale and trembling.

"He is dead," said the captain.

"Otherwise we had not been alive," remarked Wild.

The government regarded the death of Brent as the removal of almost the last of a dangerous and persevering band of conspirators, and Wild received the thanks of the King.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE CASTLE CELL OF NEWGATE

JACK SHEPPARD had been marked down as the next victim of Jonathan Wild's animosity. The prospect looked bad for the daring young adventurer. After the robbery at Islington and the discomfiture of Hichen, Jack had resolved to leave the country, whether in a fit of virtuous resolution or to change the venue of his depre-

dations it is hard to say. But Wild started every human hound he could command upon the lad's trail. Hichen's narrative of the affair at Islington maddened Wild. Quilt had never seen him in such an ungovernable rage. He almost struck Hichen, while he poured upon him a shower of imprecations. "You empty-headed fool!" he said. "Why did you not act upon the plan I gave you? You take anything in the act! You miserable, blatant idiot!" And Hichen had bounced out of the room, saying he would see who was the idiot. Thereupon began the paper fight between Wild and Hichen which the City Marshal was already engaged upon, as we have seen, when Wild called to make matters up and put the City Marshal to further base uses, and was denied. Sheppard, however, was taken as he was leaving Mistress Cook's rooms on his way to Bess, who had changed her lodging, leaving with Dolly particulars of her whereabouts. Jack had resolved to say "Farewell" to Bess; and Blueskin had settled a rendezvous whence they would start for Southampton. Instead, however, of in a ship that should take them to a foreign port, Jack found himself once more in Newgate.

Blueskin, meanwhile, had gone fearlessly to Wild and given him his own version of the failure at Islington, keeping back nothing and compelling something like a grunt of amusement from Wild when he related the scene of Hichen's complete overthrow, repeating, with embellishments, the charges he and Sheppard had made against the City Marshal. In this Blueskin knew he would appeal to Wild's hatred of Hichen, and also to his appreciation of astute and successful strategy. At the same time, Sheppard's mutiny, the handing over of the packet of papers to Beryl, and the sacrifice of the booty of the night, were matters that accentuated Wild's bitterness against Sheppard, which was not softened by

his successful disposal of Brent, though he had latterly regarded him as his bitterest foe. He absolved Blake for the present, with the full intention of wreaking his vengeance upon him when he should have no further use for him. Blueskin ventured to put in a word for Sheppard, but to no good purpose.

Jack, meanwhile, was taking his life philosophically, and not without hope, in what was called the "Castle cell" of Newgate, the strongest room in the prison, where he was chained to the floor, padlocked, and manacled, the chains soldered into the floor and riveted about his legs and waist.

There is a well-known picture of the prisoner in this condition. The chains seem to have been exaggerated by the artist; but I have seen them only recently. They were of enormous weight, and the padlock and staple no less formidable. Jack's previous escape had made so much noise that crowds of people now applied to see him. Many were admitted. Among them were ladies of fashion. He diverted them by recounting his rogueries. The ladies gave him bouquets. Some of them kissed him; others left him money. This he gave to his keepers and to Edgeworth Bess. The latter, being also under suspicion of a felony, was afraid to visit him, except in disguise. She made her way to his side, however, in the make-up of an old woman. Blueskin appeared as a countryman, was searched, and a chisel being found upon his person, he was bundled out of the gates unceremoniously. The closest watch was kept upon every visitor, and before the doors were barred for the night Jack was searched, and his irons, locks, and rivets examined; so that no possible chance should be given for his escape, or even an attempt at it. Extra warders were posted in the ante-rooms of the main entrance; and Master Applebee, the chief-warder or keeper of the Castle cell, considered

himself a match for a dozen Jack Sheppards, now that he and his fellow-officers were fully warned of the sort of desperado they guarded and had full authority to manacle and chain him as they pleased. Wild had visited the lad, and had gloated over him and bade him prepare for Tyburn. Jack had responded with sneers and jests and scoffing, though he had made complaint of Wild's conduct, and Master Wild had been requested not again to enter the convict's cell, which Wild had resented, but without avail. He had counted too much on his recent achievement. The City authorities cared little or nothing about Jacobite plotters. That business had become stale, and they were jealous of the position and assumed authority of Jonathan Wild. It had long been shrewdly suspected that the City Marshal was untrue to his office and a traitor to the State; so that the reader will not be unprepared for the news vouchsafed to Jack by Master Applebee, his keeper.

The lad had been successfully at work upon his handcuffs. Notwithstanding the severity of the keeper's surveillance and the watchfulness of his assistants, Jack had contrived to secrete about his person a nail of considerable strength. Nor had it been brought into the prison by any of his visitors. He had seen it, almost from the first hour of his incarceration, its head a dull mark between two of the paving-stones, close by the bench upon which he was seated. It had not been necessary to secure it for obtaining relief from his handcuffs. He had a singularly narrow hand, and a small wrist; but, on being handcuffed, he would spread out his hand, making it as broad as possible, and complain of the tightness of the irons. Before the first night of his imprisonment in the Castle cell was over, he had slipped his right hand through the iron bracelet, and satisfied himself that the other one was quite as easy. Then his next

hope was that the nail would be something more than the head of one, that it would be a long nail and a strong nail. His next hope was the chimney. It was a strange oversight of the prison builder that in this strong room of Newgate he should have placed a fireplace and a chimney. You will hardly, I think, find it stated in any of the histories of the time how the prisoner could possibly have unfastened his irons with a nail. In the play on the stage it did not appear, however, so strange as it does if you think the situation out for yourself, and contemplate the picture of the lad, loaded with chains and bars and riveted to the floor. I did not understand it myself until recently, on examining the chains, which are still preserved at Newgate, and having an explanation from an old and experienced officer, who pointed out to me that to prevent the weight of the anklets from fretting and wounding the flesh, they were lined with leather; and herein lies the secret of Sheppard's successful manipulation of his chains, which, after all, was not half so remarkable as the incidents that immediately followed, as we shall see.

"A prison's a devil of a place to set a fellow thinking," Jack was saying to himself, the day after Wild had done for Sir Patrick Brent. "Jack, my boy, if you get out of this they ought to give you a medal or make you Inspector of Prisons! Where the deuce shall I put that nail, now I've got it, when old Applebee comes and makes his little search? Wonder if I shall do the blokes once more."

Then he hummed his favourite ditty, and stooped to prod away at the leather lining of his manacles. It has generally been represented that the lad either picked the padlock or chopped and filed and prodded through one of the links of his irons! He did nothing of the kind. His experience of slipping the darbies suggested to him

that if he could work out the leather lining of his anklets he could also slip them in the same way. He was engaged in this operation when the bolts and bars of the cell were being withdrawn. The noise was as good as a signal. If the keepers had been as cunning as they thought, they would have entered the cell at sudden moments, and noiselessly, if possible. Jack at once resumed his handcuffs, and continued his singing.

"Always singing, or talking to yourself," said Applebee, the jailor, entering with the prisoner's rations.

"It's so lonely on the days you don't admit visitors," Jack replied.

"Well, a song's a good thing in it's way; but it ain't no sort of substitute for dinner."

He placed a basin and piece of bread and meat upon the bench.

"You are such a wise old Solomon, you are," said Jack.

"That's more than I can say for you. You run your head into the noose as if you liked it," said Applebee, laughing.

A genial, pleasant old fellow was Applebee, not so old but he was lithe of limb, not so severe a keeper that he did not enjoy a jest; and he was proud of being in charge of so illustrious a prisoner as Captain Sheppard.

"Ah, now you do hit the right nail on the head," Jack replied; adding, with a humorous smile, "you don't happen to have such a thing as a nail about you, two or three inches long, eh?"

"No; nor a file, nor a gimlet, nor a pair of pincers. No good trying it on this time, my fine fellow; you're done for at last; make the best of it. Eat your soup, and say your prayers."

"Let's try a hymn," Jack answered; and began to sing the doleful ditty of Captain Hind—

"'When Captain Hind got into the cart,
No braver man than he;
He quaffed his glass, and kissed his lass,
On the way to the Triple Tree.'"

"Oh, come, Captain Sheppard, don't be so frivolous!"

"It's the Sessions to-day, ain't it?" asked Jack.

"It is, and such a Sessions—more prisoners than we knows what to do with."

"So busy as that?"

"Yes; and the City Marshal, Master Hichen, was like to be one of 'em."

"No!"

"Yes! Leastwise, he's suspended from his office. It's took him sharp in the stomach, they say, and he be at his lodgings, mighty sick."

"He was a poor fool."

"And worse," Applebee replied. "But, come, mop up your rations, and let me go."

"Can't you leave them?"

"What? Leave you a can that you'd turn into a file and a gimlet and no end of things, like winking? Not if I know it."

"All right. Gimme the soup."

Jack kept his nail well concealed in the palm of his hand. Applebee raised the basin, and Jack was enabled to stoop down, so that he could hold it to his lips. As he was drinking the not too powerful liquid, a dismal voice was heard singing the chant of the condemned, a custom of the time—

"'Now all ye who in the condemned cell do lie,
Prepare your souls, for to-morrow you must die.'"

"The bellman's chant," said Applebee, pulling off his cap and bending his head.

"'Watch all and pray, the hour is drawing near,
That you before the Almighty must appear;
Examine well yourselves, in time repent,
That you may not to eternal flames be sent,
And when St. Pulchre's bell to-morrow tolls,
The Lord have mercy on your souls.'"

And then the chanter proclaimed the hour in his deepest bass. Jack paused for a moment, but only to chime in with his own defiant song—

"'When Captain Hind got into the cart,
No braver man than he——'"

"Jack! Jack!" remonstrated Applebee.

"'He quaffed his glass, he kissed his lass,
On the way to the Triple Tree,'"

continued Jack; and now, while he finished his soup, the voice of the bellman trailed off into the distance for the benefit of prisoners more soberly resigned than Jack.

Dinner being over, the lad slipped the nail into his mouth, and, holding it in his cheek, found it of little impediment to his speaking, though Applebee noticed a change.

"Very stale bread, the Newgate loaf," said Jack; "takes me an hour to get my proper voice back."

"Ah, my fine captain, the day's comin' when you won't get it back at all, and it's a pity you don't think of it seriously."

He stooped to examine the chains, manacles, and fitments that held his prisoner, as he did on each visit to the lad's cell.

"Find the ornaments all right?" asked Jack.

"Yes, lad; more useful than ornamental. If you were free, all but the lock and staple, the rivets 'ud puzzle you."

"Where's the chimney go to?" asked Jack, turning his head in the direction of the fireplace.

"'Cause why?"

"That's the way I shall get out of Newgate this time.

"'When Captain Hind got into the cart,
No braver man than he——'"

Jack found the nail rather an obstruction to his singing. He had forgotten it for a moment.

"Up the chimney—like Old Mother Goose on a broom-stick, eh?"

"Just like that," said Jack.

"Very well, captain. I'll keep a lookout on the chimney."

"Terrible lonely," said Jack. "When shall you come again?"

"At supper-time; ain't that soon enough for you?"

"I shall be up the chimney by then."

"Ah, ah, ah!" laughed Applebee. "You're a merry lad, I will say that for you; but perhaps it's as well to laugh while you can. Remember me to the Man in the Moon!"

The door closed, the locks and bars were fastened, and the prisoner was once more alone, and likely to remain so for hours.

"The more you speak the truth," thought Jack, "the less they believe you. Fate's deuced good to me, after all; provides me with the very best kind of nail that's made; has the Sessions on to make the officers busy; won't permit Wild to come here any more whenever he likes; and last, but not least, has a chimney put into the Castle cell!"

As he ruminated, he worked away at the leather lining.

"Poor old Blueskin was right," he thought, and almost thought aloud. "With the double trade of a locksmith and a carpenter at your fingers' ends, you've got such an education as a cracksman, it makes the art a perfect science."

He dug away at the leather with untiring persistence. After an hour he fell back exhausted. Presently he returned to the work. Scraps of leather and dust began to make quite a ring about the lad's right foot. He was working with his left hand, feeling that if he should have time to do no more than release one foot, he could the better work his way up the chimney with his right than with his weaker limb. Time went quickly, he felt. He could hear the clock of St. Paul's strike the hours, and the watchman make his rounds singing his chant once more, which only intensified the lad's eagerness to escape. At length his ankle began to make play. It no longer closely filled the anklet. He could move it easily, and he began to push down the iron ring towards his heel. After three hours of hard work, it was free from the casing, and with some pain and a good deal of abrasion of the skin his foot was at liberty. He gave a deep sigh of relief, and, without a moment's rest, pegged away at the anklet of his other foot. In half the time that it had taken to release his right foot, his left was free. He stood upright, and considered what he could do if Applebee returned before supper. While he was considering, he examined the rivets of the chain about his waist. It was evident he could do nothing with them. If he escaped, he would have to drag his chains along with him. It only took a few minutes to come to this decision. Otherwise, he was thinking, it would be a fine thing to gag Applebee, and chain him up in his place. He sat down for a spell, and in response to the prison chant tried a stave of "Nix my dolly." He pulled off his stockings.

The prison authorities had no fear of his hanging himself in his garters. They felt sufficiently assured that he would never be able to unloosen his chains, or in any way to elude the vigilance of his keepers. With his garters and stockings he fastened his anklets and their chains to the links about his waist, put on his boots, and walked. The lad hummed his Hind ditty triumphantly. It was true, he seemed to do little more than hobble; but he moved about the cell, examined it thoroughly, and came to the unshaken conclusion that his only chance was by the chimney.

"Now, if I can only work my way to the roof, and thence to the street, which will be nothing short of a miracle, hang me! if don't get Page, the butcher, to file off these rivets, get a suit of togs at my Lord Donnington's, and——"

His heart almost stood still. There was a noise at the door. It sounded as if Applebee was about to withdraw the bolts. He faced about, and, grasping the darbies in his right hand, prepared for the most desperate of contingencies.

CHAPTER XXIII

AND AFTERWARDS

It was a false alarm. After listening for a few minutes, with fierce intensity he flung a parting jibe at the absent warder. "Now, master jailor," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "I'll sweep your damned chimney for you!" and up he went. His progress, however, was speedily stopped by an iron bar. He descended and set to work on the over-mantel, displacing the mortar with his nail and eventually removing a brick. "Get a brick out and

you may pull a house down," he said to himself as he dug his nail into the mortar and presently laid a second brick quietly upon the floor. Then he met with stones and cement. Nothing daunted him. He had soon made a hole big enough to enable him to come at the bar, which "proved a providential weapon," as he remarked to Master Austin at a later day. It was an inch square and a yard long. With its aid, coming to the next floor, he made so great a breach that he entered the Red Room that was situated over the Castle cell. The door had not been opened for seven years past; but in less than seven minutes he wrenched off the lock and found himself in the passage leading to the chapel. Here he was obstructed by a door that was bolted on the further side. After listening carefully and hearing no sound of footsteps or voices, he worked on the wall first with his nail and then with his iron bar and made a hole, through which he groped for the bolt, found it, and pushed it back. Coming now to the chapel door, he broke off one of the iron spikes that were fixed for protection above the gate, and thrust it into the belt he had contrived with his irons and garters, in case it might be useful either as an implement or a weapon. Then climbing up the door and over it, he emerged into an entry between the chapel and the lower leads. The door of this passageway was very strong. It was fastened with a great lock, and, what was still worse, night had overtaken him, and he found it exceedingly difficult to work in the dark. But the chapel spike helped to make up for this. It was even more useful than the nail, and in half an hour he forced off the box of the lock and opened the door, which led him to another that presented still greater difficulties; for it was not only locked, but barred and bolted. Having tried in vain to make this lock and box give way, he attacked the fillet and wrenched it from the

main post of the door. The box and staples came away with it; and now St. Sepulchre's chimes went eight. He listened to the well-known music and counted the strokes of the hour.

There was yet another gate or door betwixt him and the lower leads, but, being bolted on his side, he opened it easily, and, mounting to the top of it, climbed over the wall and so to the upper leads. Now the question was how to get down. He seemed to be very near the stars. Looking about him and finding that the roof of Turner's house adjoined that of Newgate, he concluded that this was the most convenient resting-place on his way to the ground. At the same time it was too high for a leap, and there was no means of climbing down; so he resolved to go back to his cell, the way he had come, and fetch his blanket.

Nothing in the history of Sheppard's adventures demonstrates more characteristically the lad's courage, patience, and resolution than this retracing of his steps back along the tortuous way he had traversed. He went back step by step, sometimes groping his way, now and then only lighted by the stars and the glimmer of the sky. All the way he had to keep his irons from clanking, and all the way he had to take care that he did not lose himself in the labyrinth of the prison. . . . He got back safely, picked up his blanket, and climbed with it to the upper leads of the gaol. Here, by means of the spike from the chapel, he fastened the blanket to the wall, and so, sliding down, dropped upon the roof or leads of Turner's house, as St. Sepulchre's was striking nine. The Turners' garret door on the leads was open. He entered and crept as softly as might be, with his various encumbrances, down one pair of stairs. His irons giving a clink, he heard a woman exclaim, "Lord! what noise was that?" and somebody answered: "Noise? The dog or the cat, what

else?" and thereupon Jack, fearing to pass the room, where people were evidently sitting down together, returned to the garret and kept close for an hour. Then he ventured once more to descend the first stair, when he heard a gentleman take leave of the company, saw the maid of the house light him to the door, and heard her lock it. As soon as she came back and had shut the chamber or parlour door, he made the best of his way down the second pair of stairs, found the street door, unlocked it, and so once more breathed the free air, just about the time that Blueskin, Bess, Horton, and Dolly Cooke were bemoaning his fate at a tavern hard by, where they paused to fortify themselves on their way to the "Cross Shovels."

The conventional dry-as-dust historian offers no suggestion concerning the way in which Jack spent the remainder of that eventful night or the next; happily, it falls to the lot of the author of the present chronicles to fill this gap, as will be seen as the story progresses; but it is worth while adding to this more or less formal account of the most famous of all Jack's escapes the historical information that on the first of November not only the feet-locks but his handcuffs also were found in a room belonging to one Mistress Cooke in Cranbourn Alley. It is probable that Jack had sent them to Dolly or Bill Horton as keepsakes, for it is certain that it was not at Dolly Cooke's that he found comfort and assistance and the new suit of clothes in which he disported himself soon after he closed the street door of Turner's house and once more snapped his fingers at Newgate.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"RATS!" AND THE MISSING PACKET

It was hardly a stone's throw from Wild's house to Alderman Whetton's, where Quilt had appointed to meet Mr. Owen Wood on the night of the festival of the Minters at the "Cross Shovels." Nevertheless, he went thither by a roundabout way. He had many reasons for being cautious. It might have been an interval for reflection that he desired before his interview with Wood. The influence of Wild seemed to cling to him long after he was free of the Old Bailey on some mission for his wily chief, whom he was now about to betray. It had been a long, tedious, and bitter service, and there was blood upon it; not that he had assisted to shed any, except in the case of Sir Patrick Brent; and that, after all, was only an act of justice.

Quilt, during his slavery at the Old Bailey, had never been able to find the papers that might have condemned him, or it is possible he would have escaped years before. But there was a panel in the room where Ferrish had breathed his last that was his secret, and not Wild's. The wily thief-taker, indeed, did not know his own house quite so well as he thought; nor, with all his cleverness, had he been able to fathom the depths of Quilt Arnold's duplicity. Quilt owed him many a grudge, which the delivery into his own hands of the incriminating pocket-book, and his promises of partnership by no means satisfied. Partnership! Had he not been his partner for years, without, however, the smallest share of profits? Wild credited Quilt with having money laid by, and this

was true; but it had been laid by in the merest driblets of savings, and amounted to very little after all. Quilt had a sister whom he devotedly loved, and whose story would be worth the telling if we had the time; and this meant that Quilt had stolen hours of happiness in a little house which he kept over the head of the girl, whose marriage was to take place the moment Quilt could get fairly free from his bondage. And now he was going to remove the last of his fetters and pay back some of the misery Wild had inflicted upon him, and begin, as he hoped, a new life. There was something of the rat-like instinct of quitting the sinking ship, too, in Quilt's manœuvre. He knew that the trouble with Hichen was the beginning of the end, and he had, in an anonymous warning, suggested to Wild the advisability of quitting the country.

But enough of this exordium. Wood received Quilt in a private room at the Alderman's; and with that meeting the axe may be said to have struck the first serious blow toward the downfall of the gigantic growth of corruption and villainy that shadowed the Old Bailey and shed its unwholesome fruit over Newgate.

"You are punctual, Master Quilt," said Wood.

"I almost feared I might be too early."

"Never too early for a good deed, Master Quilt."

"We cannot be overheard here?"

"I think not," said Wood. He opened the door, looked into the passage, and lifted the velvet curtains by the window, adding, "You may trust me."

"I do, heartily, as you trust me," said Quilt. "Your daughter is with you?"

"Yes; we came here this morning, and shall remain for a few days. The Alderman has placed his coach at our disposal for our expedition to-night."

"And Eric Beryl?"

"He goes without my daughter's knowledge, and has made arrangements with Blueskin to see him to the 'Shovels' and home to his rooms in Piccadilly."

"He is well supported. Jonathan Wild has no sterner foe to-day."

"When a bandit betrays his chief for money and revenge, he is a safe ally," Wood replied.

"I am that bandit, Master Wood; but Blueskin has a love for Jack Sheppard that is beyond all price."

"Rot the lad!" said Wood. "My daughter has an insane passion to save him; it is as if all her happiness in life depended upon it. Furthermore, between you and me, Master Quilt, in this night's adventure there is also a desire on her part to see the woman they call Edgeworth Bess, who, we hear, claims to be his wife."

"She is not the only claimant," said Quilt, with a faint smile.

"The villain!" exclaimed Wood.

"Your daughter's mask will protect her; but she must be prepared to see and hear things that may shock her."

"That is her own lookout," Wood answered; "she goes of her own obstinate will. My wife, look you, would not deign to put her nose into such company, not to save a whole army of Jack Sheppards."

"You are fortunate in your good lady, sir."

"I don't know about that," said Wood, with a shrug of his broad shoulders; "but I shall be a fortunate man indeed if you keep faith with me, and we succeed in putting Eric Beryl into possession of his titles and estates."

"You will never get the whole of the documents from Jonathan Wild. He will exhaust your patience as well as your purse, and"—Quilt lowered his voice, and looked round the room mysteriously—"murder you in the end."

"God forbid!" said Wood.

"I hate, despise, and fear him. I have done nearly all the work in this matter of the Waller and Brent estates, and he has not rewarded me to the extent of a guinea. To-night the whole of the documents necessary to complete the business will be in my possession. In the meantime, here is the packet you have heard so much about, but never seen; the papers Wild promises you are but abstracts of documents made from memory, and his affidavit of the statements of Ferrish, the servant who saved Eric Beryl, and died while, as he imagined, he was handing over to Wild the papers that are so precious to you and your friends—the sequel to those he sold to you——"

"Yes, yes," said Wood, eagerly, as Quilt drew from his breast the packet that had so mysteriously disappeared from the death-bed of the man Ferrish.

The reader has long since guessed whose was the hand that clutched the packet on that tragic occasion.

"Apart from these papers, which have never been in his possession, Master Wild promised me two thousand guineas when the Brent incident should be closed, as he called it; and, so far as I am concerned, it was closed by the death of Sir Patrick in his attack on Wild."

"Let me see the papers."

Quilt untied the packet, and Wood, with trembling hands and eager eyes, examined them.

"What a godsend! They do, indeed, complete the story, of which the documents I had from the man Ferrish was the beginning. I care not if he burn the others we are to have to-morrow; these are enough for all purposes. My dear Quilt, I don't know how to thank you; but you shall have the two thousand guineas, a bill for half of it now, on the spot, if you desire it."

"Thank you, no, sir. I will see you early in the morning and receive your most generous reward, which

I hope to use in as virtuous a manner as you could wish."

"Use it how the devil you please, Quilt; it is yours, and I am beholden to you, and so is Eric, for the rest of our lives, and longer, for that matter. May I, then, take this packet now, without a payment on account?"

"It is yours, sir," said Quilt; "we understand and trust each other. And now, if it so please you, and the carriage is ready, we will proceed to the 'Shovels.' There is talk of a rescue of Sheppard on the way to Tyburn. You may hear of this from Joseph Blake; but I fear me poor Jack is wearing out his last hope in his latest manacles."

CHAPTER XXXV

ON THE WAY TO THE "CROSS SHOVELS"

MASTER WOOD, his daughter, and their escort, Quilt Arnold, had only just driven away from the Old Bailey when Blueskin paused in Newgate Street, arrested by familiar voices.

"So help me, by all that's wonderful, and you comes this way, too?"

"Why, Blueskin, my boy," exclaimed Bill Horton, with a woman on each arm, "why not this way? It's as nigh to the 'Shovels' as Thames Street."

"Oh, oh! is it? Or as nigh as Holborn? Well, then, be it so. I count myself in luck to meet you. What, Bess, and Mistress Cooke? Well, then, this is cheery, though we do meet under the shadow of that infernal Rumbo."

The Whit, or Rumbo, were both cant phrases for

Newgate, whose hard front frowned upon them as they passed it.

"Come on, my buxom pal, let me have your companionship," continued Blueskin, separating Bess from Horton. "Keep on your masks until we touch the bridge."

"Nay, but we're safe enough the other side the road, and——"

"Poor Bess has been drawn to the place; wanted to cry, and say 'Goodbye,'" remarked Dolly.

"We're all down in the mouth," said Horton; "not the kind of feeling for a Minters' night."

"Let's get into the dark of this entry," said Blueskin. "What's in the wind, I wonder! I heard the hue-and-cry as I turned out of Ludgate. For the flash of a second I thought it might be another escape of Captain Sheppard."

"No such luck as that, alas!" said Bess.

"Some other victim of Wild's hunted down. And yet I thought I heard the alarm bell of the Whit."

"A fire bell," said Horton. "We met 'em, Dolly and I, going towards Fleet Street."

"And you calls this the near way to the 'Shovels'?" said Blueskin. "Out with it, Bess; what's in the wind?"

"She wanted to blow a kiss to Jack," said Dolly. "Poor Bess!"

"I tried to get at him," said Bess. "That jackal, Quilt, promised to help me; give me Wild's order, and I took a gimlet and a chisel; but, Lord love you! they was up to it, as if they could have seen the gimlet in my shoe and the chisel in my stocking."

"They've nabbed him for good, this time, I'm afeard. Come, let us be moving; we're watched," said Blueskin.

"Ain't it awful!" said Bess, weeping in spite of herself. "They thinks women such as us has no hearts, old pal; but I don't want to live a minute longer if they part me and Jack at Tyburn!"

"Here, pals, let's turn into the 'Keys' and drink a measure of sack to our better fortunes, and the drawer shall fetch us a rattler, and we'll go to the 'Shovel' in state. The girls are both fashed with the vapours."

They entered a tavern close by, where Horton was not unknown as an occasional and always a generous customer; and having answered their call the drawer went out to bring them a coach.

"Cheer up, dear pals; it's a great night at the 'Shovels,'" said Blueskin, "and we must hold up our heads strong for the sake of Jack; it 'ud hurt his pride if we was low at such a time. And I've got a new pal to introduce, my gentleman Eric Beryl, a lord in disguise if ever there was one."

"What's he want at the 'Shovels'?" Bess asked.

"To see life; and by the sacred memory of the first of the Minters, he shall! He's a friend of Jack's, and wants to be in the swim with us for the captain's rescue, and I gives you his health, which we'll call it the Idle and the Industrious Apprentices, and long life to 'em both!"

"Long life!" said Bess, bitterly; but they all emptied their glasses, and Dolly put up her mask.

"Why, Dolly, what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," said Dolly, laying the mask aside. "I wasn't just thinking what I was doing."

"But I ask again, what's this young man, this lord in disguise as you calls 'im, want at the 'Shovels'?" said Bess.

"He was Jack's fellow-apprentice; and one day he'll be a knight, perhaps a lord, and——"

"I don't think I'm well enough to go to the 'Shovels,'" said Dolly.

"Why, what is it, Dolly? You were well and hearty a few minutes since."

"A sudden faintness," she replied.

"Leave her to me," said Bess, taking her into her arms and soothing her with gentle words, that were so unusual on Bess's lips that they affected the two men, even Blueskin and Highwayman Bill.

"Cheer up, for my sake," said Bess, kissing her. "That's right; she's better; it was just a touch of the megrims. I've had 'em myself. Dolly's the only woman that can sympathise with me. You should have seen her when Wild threatened you, Bill; you should have heard her when we was afeard you was going in the cart. So she can feel with me, now that my Jack is marked down for misery."

"Nay, Bill, but Bess does not know everything; I wish I was as true to you as she to Jack."

"Oh, come!" said Bill. "Drink this, and be yourself, the best, the truest little woman man ever was blessed with."

He pressed a full glass of sack to her lips. She drank it, and seemed to make an effort at gaiety.

"Thank you, Bill; I'm better. Before the night's out I shall ask you a favour."

"And I swear by the saints, if they will condescend to so miserable a sinner, that I'll grant it, whatever it may be!"

"You will?"

"On my honour, yes."

"The rattler's a-beatin' along the street; it's comin' to the 'Keys,'" said Blueskin. "Cheer up, Bess."

"I am cheering up," she said, between her sobs; "I am cheering up. Goodbye, Jack. Goodbye! good-

bye!" She dragged on her mask, more to hide her tears than to hide her face.

"And look here, pals—you, Edgeworth Bess, you, Dolly Cooke, and you, Bill Horton, my dearest pals—so help me—every oath that's awful! If anything happens to Jack, I'll cut Wild's throat by inches—by inches, damn him!"

"You will!" exclaimed Bess, once more her defiant self.

"As I hope to 'scape the gallows!"

"Then let's straight to the 'Shovels,'" said Bess, "and show a bold face. Let's hope for good luck to-morrow, while we toast good fortune to-night!"

"Spoken like Edgeworth Bess!" said Horton.

And the drawer entered, to tell them there was a rattler at the door; and presently it rattled heavily and noisily enough on the way to Southwark and the "Cross Shovels."

CHAPTER XXXVI

"A GREAT OCCASION"

THE "Cross Shovels" was the thieves' rendezvous of that strange, wild district of Southwark known as "The Mint." Delinquent debtors, highwaymen, and freebooters found sanctuary there. It was outside the lines of law and order. Constables and bailiffs gave it a wide berth. It was the headquarters of the sons and daughters of misrule from the days of the first Charles to those of the second George; and had its counterpart in a small way, but on a more luxurious scale, even as late as the close of the eighteenth century. In London everything

is possible, almost, to-day; but, under Anne and George II., it might have matched Constantinople for dirt and Mexico for lawlessness. After dark the footpad held possession of the streets and the highwayman commanded the suburbs. If you sallied forth at night unarmed or unattended, you carried your life in your hands. The Mint (not to be confounded with the money-coining institution of that name) was as much a separate country from Covent Garden, Leicester Square, and the Strand, as if it had been a hundred miles away and under an entirely different government. The "Cross Shovels," which was the headquarters of the Minters, had an elected master, or keeper, and was defended by outposts and sentinels. The chief scene of its meetings and festal gatherings was a large room, picturesque in its dilapidations, once possibly the refectory of a palace; it had a music gallery, and its ill-kept walls had once been beautifully wainscoted; its ceiling was still timbered with dark oak beams.

There were many private rooms in the place, and a kind of courtyard that helped to protect the inmates from sudden raids of bailiffs, constables, or soldiers. In addition to the entrance by a heavy doorway, from a broken and ill-ordered hall or passage, there was a stairway that led to the upper landings, where the Chief Minter lived, not in great style but in security. As a rule, the place was, in a manner, tattered and torn; the plaster falling from the ceilings, the wainscoting out of repair, the pilasters on the music gallery broken, the railing in patches. But on this festival of the foundation of the Minters' kingdom, a good deal had been done to give an air of prosperity, and even cleanliness, to the place.

Here, among a motley crew, were assembled Blueskin, Edgeworth Bess, Dolly Cooke, and Bill Horton, Master Longden (long since a full-blown highwayman), and many celebrities of the road. They were in various costumes,

many richly dressed, some of the men fresh from expeditions on the great highways, their jack-boots splashed with mud, their fine gold-laced coats disordered, their pistols emptied, their pockets full. There were boisterous women of the town, and nervous visitors in masks under gallant escorts. Eric Beryl wore his mask, though he was formally introduced by Blueskin to the Master of the Mint, Master Kettlewell, with a flourish of titles; and the Master responded with a bow, "Welcome, my Lord of the Isles, duly and well vouched for."

"You, too, Master Blake," added the Minters' chief, "you are welcome always and in all weathers. My dear Lord of the Isles, your friend Master Blake's passport is good for every corner of London where the liberty of the subject is sacred and the tyrannical pests of society, such as bailiffs and constables, are tabooed."

Blake bowed, as the Master moved away, with "Again welcome to the Mint," on his lips, which he repeated to others.

The guests now began to arrive in numbers. Some of them at once sat down to cards, others sat round tables or in groups by themselves, drinking and telling stories; some making rough love to their women partners. Another company kept near the Master, to assist him in receiving the guests.

Jim Carpenter, a misanthrope among freebooters, in a shabby riding costume, lounged in, whip in hand, boots splashed with mud, and a face of gloomy aspect. Evidently they all knew him.

"Why, Jim, you look mighty blue," said the Master.

"Do I ever have any luck, Master?" Jim replied, in a lugubrious tone of voice.

"You're always down on it, if you have," said Kettlewell.

"Tell us all about it, Jim," demanded several voices.

"Three hours at Finchley; the road wired with care; would have brought down a troop of cavalry; expected post horses and coach; knew they'd bait at Barnet; no end of swag aboard; and we caught a market gardener's cart, loaded with cabbages!"

"Oh, oh! Ah, ah!" laughed the Master.

Friends of the discomfited highwayman laid hands upon him, and dragged him to a cosy corner of sympathetic pals. He was soon consoled under the influence of a stoup of liquor.

Gentleman Horton had a hearty welcome. He was the *beau idéal* of the highwaymen of tradition and picture-books; a gallant of the road, with the swagger and abandon of a Claude Du Val, robust of limb, a flowing wig, a crimson square-cut coat with lace ruffles, top-boots, a cocked hat, pistols in his belt, and on his arm a masked beauty, too timid, it might have been thought, for Mistress Cooke; but Dolly may be said to have had a call to love and virtue, and she shrank from the broad familiarities of Horton's friends and companions. She was a woman of a very different stamp from Edgeworth Bess.

"A fine-looking fellow," said Beryl to Blueskin, as they sat watching the scene over a bottle of wine, Blueskin smoking a long pipe; "the carriage and manners of a gentleman."

"He is a gentleman, born and bred," said Blueskin; "and has a voice worthy of the opera. They'll be calling on him for a song presently. Took his degree at Oxford; then took to the road, jilted by the girl he loved."

"Poor devil!" said Eric.

"Not at all," said Blueskin; "making his thousands."

"And the lady by his side?"

"In the mask? Who but Dolly Cooke, his pretty mistress?"

Dolly had already, she thought, spotted Eric. She knew that Blueskin was to introduce him to the Mint. And now she heard his voice; and her heart beat wildly.

"Bill, dear!" she whispered.

"Yes, Dolly. What is it?"

"A song from Gentleman Horton!" shouted the Master. "It is demanded of many."

"Yes, yes! A song!" exclaimed a multitude of voices.

"Your health and song, in advance, my hearty!" said Blueskin, raising his glass.

"Your health and song!" roared the crowd; and Bill, giving Dolly a seat, stood by her side and sang a ballad of the highway in a fine baritone voice, and concluded it amidst shouts of "Hurrah for the Road!" and "Long life to Claude Du Val the Second!" Whereupon Horton said, "Thank you, my friends; but let me be 'Bill Horton the First.'"

"So you shall!" they replied; and a brace of buxom, brazen-faced women put their bare arms about him and kissed him, the first one remarking, as she faced the crowd, "And that's how we seal it. Bill Horton the First, and good fortune to him!"

At this moment, Longden, the hypocrite, entered, with a noisily-attired lady on his arm, and was duly welcomed.

Meanwhile, Mistress Cooke, coaxing Bill Horton away, said, "Come into the Minters' private room; I've a word to say to you."

They passed beyond what might be called the bar, where drawers and tapsters were busy, and, while the small string band in the gallery was playing an old English march, entered one of the suite of private apartments, somewhat sordidly though showily furnished.

"What is it, Dolly?"

"Everything," she said, removing her mask. "I want to confess to you, Bill. I love you; what is more,

I respect you; what is more, I want you to give up this business of the highway."

"Dolly, what's wrong?"

"I love you, Bill; but I want you to take me away from temptation."

"From temptation! What is it?"

"The young man—Eric Beryl," she said.

"The youngster you and Bess saved from Wild's sloop?"

"The same."

"What of him?"

"Take me away from England."

"Damme, I'll kill him! What has he done?"

"I fear I love him."

"By all the saints!——"

"Don't swear, Bill. It is an idle liking; it came from his innocence, and devotion to another. I think, after all, it's not love, but respect; it is the only shadow that has ever crossed my love for you, Bill. But I have had dreams and presentiments. You defend your business of the highway; you were forced into it by misfortune."

"And love, Dolly—and love," said Horton. "You were not my first."

"You were mine," said Dolly.

"But you have a second?"

"Not if you take me away and give up your present mode of life. I have dreamt of you in the cart; I have seen you with Jonathan Wild's foot upon your neck; I am afraid. I know that you have money; have I not a heavy purse myself? There are other lands where we may be happy, and you free from arrest. I once heard you in your sleep repeat a prayer your mother taught you; I have felt your voice tremble when you have spoken of your father and your student days at Oxford——"

"Dolly, the only sunshine in this present trade of mine

has come from your eyes, the only music from your sweet voice; do with me what you will, I am yours. Wild hates me; Wild means to hang me, I verily believe; I have already narrowly escaped his fatal resentment. Little woman, we will cheat him and misery!"

He took her into his arms, and she sobbed upon his shoulder.

And now there entered the general reception room Master Wood and Quilt, neither of them masked, with Ellaline Wood between them; the girl soberly attired in grey, lightly hooded, cloaked, and masked.

Quilt whispered to the Master. Blueskin was observing him. The Master shook his head. Wood and Ellaline stood aside. Quilt drew from his pocket a purse. The Master weighted it. Quilt mentioned the amount. The Master pocketed it, and, turning to his immediate attendants and the crowd generally, said—

"Pals and my most noble army of Minters: we who reign foremost above the Savoy or the Friars of Salisbury Court, we who never allow a minion of the law or a professed thief-taker to cross our borders, are willing to make exception to one who revokes his former calling, having been in the service of Jonathan Wild, yet not to our knowledge himself doing wrong to the Mint, and who is now vouched for by a citizen of renown, forswears law and all its vices, and pays his footing, like a gentleman, with fifty golden guineas——"

"To be spent!" shouted half a dozen topers, supported by screams of approval from a dozen women, some in showy brocades, with *décolleté* bodices that enhanced their physical charms, some on their feet, others lolling on benches or on the knees of their lovers.

"As shall be deemed fit," said the Chief Minter. "In the meantime, Master Quilt Arnold is one of us; take him to your arms and to your hearts."

And they did, much to Quilt's discomfiture and to the great alarm of Ellaline, who, in her confusion, for a moment dropped her mask, and was revealed to the wondering gaze of Eric Beryl; who thereupon shadowed her for the rest of the night, respecting her mask and her secret, but being affectionately greeted by Wood, who intimated that he was there on a matter of serious business, from which Eric had better keep himself aloof, at least until the eventful night was over.

"May I have a word with you, fair mistress?" said Dolly Cooke, "and with your permission, kind sir," addressing Wood.

"She means no harm," said Quilt. "I know her; let her have her way."

Ellaline permitted herself to be led to a quiet part of the room, the crowd having assembled around a famous step-dancer, who was keeping fascinating time in a fascinating manner to the little string band.

"Why are you here?"

"Who are you that ask?" Ellaline replied.

"One who loves where you should."

"I do not understand."

"It was I who risked my life to save Eric Beryl; it was I and another, urged on by Sheppard, who secured his escape."

"Mistress Dolly Cooke?"

"Yes. He has spoken of me?"

"He has."

"How?"

"With admiration and gratitude."

"Don't tell me; rather say he hates me."

"But——"

"I have heard enough; don't make it impossible for me to do what I am going to do. He loves you with a devotion that martyrs give to religion. I could tell you

how he has resisted temptation. My dear young mistress, he is a man in a million; don't reject so pure and true a love; even if you think your heart is given to another, be sure that time will make it over to him whose very heart and soul, whose life and honour are yours."

Dolly ran on, with flashing eyes and heaving breast; and Ellaline could only watch and listen.

"You think it is a worthy and maidenly self-sacrifice to love one whose sins you deem misfortunes, whose crimes you imagine to be the mere result of bad company. I know him, my dear, I know him; he is not worthy to be a scavenger among honest men; he is the lowest of the gang of miscreants whose society delights him; he is a thief by nature, and a sensualist at heart, the willing comrade of footpads, prostitutes, and——"

"Oh, madame, desist, desist!" said Ellaline. "I knew him when——"

"He was too young to be a miscreant," said Dolly, continuing her hot denunciation. "I have heard that even the cub of a hyena is a thing you may fondle; but wait until it has cut its eye-teeth. Oh! my dear child, listen to one who has seen the world, and knows it, to her cost; but who, from to-night. . . . But that is of no moment to you. What is of moment is your self-respect, your honour, your good name, to say nothing of the honourable ambition of one who loves you truly, one who has claims upon you, who can give you all that is best for a woman. Will you think of what I have said? Will you let my words sink into your heart? Will you give yourself time to consider, time to reflect——"

"I will, I will!" said Ellaline. "I am sure you are sincere; your voice rings true, and my heart responds to yours."

"I know why you are here; Joseph Blake has told me. Don't let the night pass, whatever happens, without

giving Eric Beryl the encouragement he desires, the hope he has a right to look for. Oh, my God! if I were in your place!" She broke down in heart-rending sobs, that Ellaline tried to assuage, with her arms about her, her kisses on her cheeks.

While Dolly Cooke was making her womanly appeal to Ellaline, the step-dancing came to an end, and Longden, flushed with wine and a successful raid on the highway, was enlivening the general proceedings of his fellow-Minters.

"What cheer, my gallant knight of the road?" demanded the Master.

"Good, my right noble Master. I'm fresh from Hounslow and Ranelagh. Caught the new coach on the Heath, I and the Duke of Seven Dials—a big haul; picked up Lady Longden and Mistress Maria at Ranelagh; so brought the ladies here for supper."

"Introduce me, Longden," said Edgeworth Bess, coming forward.

Longden, with mock formality, introduced his ladies, who removed their masks and disclosed the bold faces of two well-known light o'-loves. They were dressed in the height of the gorgeous fashion of the time; in contrast to Bess, who had arrayed herself in the quietest gown she possessed, and which she feared she might have soon to change for mourning weeds.

"The scoundrel!" said Beryl to Blueskin.

"A born hypocrite," said Blueskin, "but evidently successful. I've only seen the vagabond once before, in his business. A likely-looking dare-devil, too."

"He is indeed," said Beryl. "You said I should learn something to-night; it is a wonderful school."

"Has Jack Sheppard come?" asked Longden, when he had ordered wine for all round and about him.

"Jack?" said Blueskin. "He'll come no more to the

'Shovels'; he's double-ironed to a double-bar let into the floor of his cell in Newgate."

"He promised to meet me here; it is nigh two weeks agone; I met him in the way of business."

"You did?"

"Even I," said Longden. "We knew each other in the days of our virtue, he, the apprentice, I, the foreman; and by those sweet and sacred days he vowed he'd meet me at the very next Minters' festival, and that very next is this present occasion."

"I'm afraid the date will be postponed," said Blueskin, "and it 'll be on the way to Tyburn instead of at the 'Cross Shovels,' if Jack's pals be as strong as they are true when the cart comes to the turnstile. A rescue, my lads, a rescue; and you shall have the plan of operations in good time."

"A rescue! a rescue!" shouted every man and woman who had heard Blueskin's remarks. "And death to the redcoats and constables that stay us!"

"Good, my friends, good. But Tyburn be swamped and busted, my lads! To hell with Tyburn and the rescue! Jack said he'd come to the 'Shovels' to-night, and whoever knew Jack to break his word to a comrade?" said Longden.

There was an earnestness in Longden's voice and manner and an assurance that brought Edgeworth Bess to his side, pale with anxiety and hope.

"But do you think he may come?" she said. "Great heavens, don't cheat us with fine words! Do you really, in your heart, think Jack can come?"

"Can, and will, both, my buxom wench! Both, my blooming Bess of Edgeworth," Longden replied, in a tone of bravado; more anxious to break the spell of melancholy that seemed to have fallen upon Bess and her friends than with a serious belief in the ubiquity of Sheppard.

Then suddenly Bess, raising her right hand, and putting the other to her ear in the act of listening, uttered a long, sibilant like sound, that was a loudly whispered "Hush—sh—sh—sh!"

"Listen! It is 'Nix my Dolly,'" she said, listening with every pore of her body. "I hear it! I hear it!"

The entire crowd were hushed, as if under a spell; and Ellaline crept back to her father's side.

"No, no, Bess, it's fancy," presently said Blueskin, reaching out for her hand.

"It is no fancy," she said in a hoarse whisper, her eyes riveted on the staircase, that gave upon the landing opposite the musicians' gallery. "Hush—sh—sh, I say! Don't you hear it?" and she began to hum the familiar tune herself, and partly utter the words—

"'In the box of a stone jug I was born——'"

The crowd began to look at each other, some impatiently, some pityingly.

"She's gone mad," said one; "drunk," said another; "wants to make a scene," remarked a third; when, suddenly lifting up both arms, with a cry, Bess rushed forward towards the stairway and clung to the banister, as the faint music of Jack's voice was heard, growing louder every second, until at last the door of the landing was flung open and there he stood; Jack, in black velvet and sparkling buttons, bowing to the crowd, cocked hat under his arm and a fine dress-sword by his side.

There was a general shout of joy and a rush to the staircase, and Jack fairly flung himself into the outstretched arms of the crowd.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT

ELLALINE and Wood and Quilt stood together, in wonderment; Quilt remarking, in an awed whisper, "A miracle, and nothing less! The keepers sequestered every tool; not a soul was admitted without being searched. A miraculous escape!"

"Oh, Jack! my dear Jack!" exclaimed Edgeworth Bess, as she fell into the lad's arms, nearly upsetting him. "Oh, dear Jack, dear old pal!"

"My love—my beauty!" responded Jack, slapping her on the back and then hugging her, and emphasising his embraces with high-sounding kisses.

"Hurrah for Captain Jack!" shouted the lookers-on.

"Give me air!" at length Jack exclaimed, struggling free from a bevy of frolicsome women, who now pushed Bess aside to claim their share of embraces. "Give me air! I've been pent up so long. It's as bad to be smothered as hanged!"

"Where did you get your fine togs, Jack?" Bess asked presently.

"In Change Alley," said Jack, with a laugh. "Master, give us some wine; I've not had a drink for five minutes. Ah, ah, my beauties, I've done 'em again, done 'em again!"

The Master and his assistants bustled about with wine and flagons of ale; and Blueskin, smiling all over his rubicund face, lighted a fresh pipe and looked on.

"My heart beats so, I fear I shall faint," said Ellaline to her father.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," replied Wood; "take a little brandy. There, that will help you."

"How well he looks," she said; "how they all admire him! Oh, what a pity we cannot get him away from such a life!" Then she turned her head, for he was sitting in Bess's lap, and another brazen woman was leaning over the bench to fondle him also.

"And to think of Dick Longden being such a rogue!" said Wood. "He was the most moral man in my shop, Master Quilt; always with a Scripture text on his lips."

"And a stolen purse in his pocket," said Quilt.

"If Jack Sheppard robbed The Cedars, he committed the crime in the interest of Eric Beryl."

"I'm bound to say no less for him, Mistress Wood; but——"

"He cannot say this is in the interest of Eric; look at the scamp," Wood replied.

"Hello, Wood!" said Longden. "What are you doing here? How's the timber trade?"

"You hypocrite!" answered Wood, facing him.

"We've both got on since last we met. What's your new line? Forgery? Not pluck enough for the road, eh, old Wych Street?"

"You proper scoundrel!" said Wood, bursting with rage.

"Got a lady with you, eh? Oh, Wood, fie, fie! You old sinner, forgetful of the confiding wife at home. I must really tell her of your infidelity. I really must! Poor, innocent Mistress Wood!"

Quilt pulled Wood back into his seat; and, happily, there was a further diversion, the Master calling upon Jack Sheppard for his favourite song, which Jack sung with a great deal of spirit and abandon, pausing between each verse to drink from a great chalice the Master had provided for him, and being affectionately mauled about

by Bess and other ladies who claimed to share in the glory of the night, the escape of the famous prison-breaker.

They drank his health; and Jack, half drunk, staggered to his feet, and swore this was the happiest moment of his life.

Then there was a sudden clearing away of chairs and tables, and the striking up by the band of a lively measure, and shouts of "A dance, a dance!"

The Master mounted a chair and addressed the company. "With your permission, ladies and gentlemen of the Mint, let each gentleman select his partner, and——"

"What about each lady?" asked Bess, dragging Jack to the centre of the room.

"I am told," said Longden, mounting a seat, "we have honoured guests present—more than one fair lady masked, visitors from allied camps, nobles, and what not, Alsatian duchesses—let us be on our best behaviour, and the dance be a minuet."

"To your places," said the Master, assuming a ceremonious manner. "Gentlemen, your partners, for the minuet and a country dance, our own particular, 'Lords and Ladies and Jack-in-the-Green.'"

"May I have the pleasure, Mistress Wood?" said Quilt.

"No, pardon me," said Wood.

Eric was hovering near; and Horton, coming forward, begged the favour of mademoiselle's hand.

Dolly bowed to Eric, both of them masked; and Horton, with a flourish of his cocked hat, and bending low to Eric, said, "Permit me to present my wife; she will be honoured——"

"With much pleasure," said Eric, offering his arm to Mistress Cooke, while Horton carried off Ellaline.

"It would never have done to stand out," said Quilt.

"No, of course not, of course not; and, though he's a thief, the man Horton seems a gentleman," said Wood.

"And is one," said Quilt, offering his arm to a somewhat ancient but lively dame; Wood standing apart and watching his daughter, who at once attracted the attention of Sheppard, for most of the women by this time had removed their masks. Ellaline danced with much grace, and Horton was a conspicuous and picturesque figure; they made a very attractive couple.

The dance for a time was conducted with something like formality. A spirit of affected refinement seemed to guide the opening movement. The men bowed to the women, the women curtseyed, as in a minuet. From the outset Ellaline appeared to exercise a curious fascination upon Jack. Every time they met he fixed his eyes upon her; and when for a time she would disappear in the throng of dancers, he looked for her, and his partner noticed it.

"If you want a new face and a new wench, damme, say so!" exclaimed Bess, giving him a push that for a moment interrupted the symmetry of the terpsichorean figure.

"Don't be a fool, Bess," he said, taking her round the waist and dashing into the second measure of the dance, which gradually became a wild revel, in which every couple made its own time and screamed its own music, with shouts of "Nix my dolly!" into which the tune had changed.

As if from sheer exhaustion, the dance at length came to an end; the men conducting their panting partners to seats at the back of the room or upon the staircase. Ellaline had stood out for some little time by the side of her father, Horton having taken up a new partner. Dolly Cooke had begged for a seat near the Woods,

where Eric was standing. During the dance he had taken pathetic leave of her; Dolly's last words were, "Woo her hotly, take no denial, capture her as the hawk the heron, no quarter; and goodbye; henceforth we are strangers!"

The last of the flying feet to pause were those of Bess and Jack. Jack, putting his partner aside, strode up to Ellaline with tipsy bravado.

"Fair lady," he said, "if your face is as fine as your figure, let us see it!"

The crowd laughed, and Ellaline stepped back in alarm. Eric stood forward, and Quilt took up a protecting attitude.

"You dance like an angel," went on Jack, unabashed. "Such grace must be crowned with the head of one. Come, madame, unmask! Unmask!"

"Yes. Unmask!" shouted the company.

"The lady will not unmask," said Quilt.

Jack, seizing Quilt by the collar, swung him aside, and laid his hand upon his sword. "Get out, you jackal! I'll run my hanger through you!"

Blueskin seized the scabbard of Jack's sword and prevented him from drawing; but Quilt had, in a moment, grasped his pistol.

"I say the lady will unmask," shouted Jack, in a passion of anger. "By heaven and hell, she shall unmask!"

"You're drunk, Jack," said Eric Beryl, falling upon Jack with an overmastering shock that flung the lad to the ground; Eric at the same time picking him up again, to the amusement of some and the annoyance of others. "Back! back!" said Eric, bravely. "Captain Sheppard is my friend. If you were not drunk, Jack, you would never behave so to a lady."

"I'm no more drunk than you are," said Jack,

shaking himself free from the grasp of Eric. "And what in thunder are you doing here?"

He made at Eric as if to strike him, whereupon Edgeworth Bess rushed into the ring which the company had made for the combatants, and put her arms around the lad to draw him away.

"Let go, you hussy!" Jack cried, thrusting her from him with an accession of strength that had come with a burst of passion. "Let go. The next that lays a hand on me I'll stab 'em!" And he felt for his sword, which Blueskin had removed.

If Jack had been drunk a moment before, it seemed as if he had now become desperately sober. Everybody stood apart. Ellaline awaiting Jack's attack.

"Now, fair mistress," he said, "what's all this to do? Off with your mask, before I tear it off!"

Wood stepped forward. Ellaline gently waved him back as she removed her mask and faced her assailant. Jack looked at her as if transfixed, stood and gazed, and then, passing his hand over his eyes, exclaimed, "Ellaline Wood—by all that's sacred!"

"Yes, Jack, it is I," said Ellaline, in a calm, soft voice.

"Why are you here?"

"To recruit an army for your rescue from Tyburn, even at the risk of our liberties."

"My God!" gasped Jack, staggering away from her. "And this woman might have loved me!" At which declaration, made as if it never occurred to the lad that there was a soul present to hear it, the assembly laughed.

"Providence has intervened for you. Be grateful. Leave this awful life. Begin a new career in a new land. We will help you. My father is rich. Your dear friend, Eric Beryl, will stand by you. Come away while there is time; be brave, be honest, be a man!"

"Here! young woman," screamed Edgeworth Bess,

pushing her way through the throng, "who are you, to preach to us and talk of a new life?"

"I am this gentleman's daughter," Ellaline replied, with dignity. "Jack Sheppard was my father's apprentice."

"Well, he's my apprentice now," said Bess, laying hold of Jack with vigour. "Be content with your own man, and leave mine to me! Jack, would you desert us? Us who have been your pals, your slaves, and would die for you?"

"Never!" exclaimed Jack, giving way to her embrace for a moment, to stand forth the next moment free and defiant. "You're right, Bess; she's got her own man, let her keep him; she's got her own life, let her live it! Ah, ah! Seek a new career in a new land! Where's there another land equal to this? Go home, Mistress Ellaline Wood, go home. Ah, ah, ah!"—he laughed almost hysterically—"go home to Mother Wood!"

Ellaline turned aside and laid her hand upon her father's arm; and Jack, with a look at Eric, and as if under a new influence of thought, went on, in a more subdued tone, "If it hadn't been for Mother Wood's damned nagging and old Wood's cruel strap—and if there'd been no Gentleman Beryl to shame me—ah, ah, who knows? Who knows? Don't be a fool, Ellaline, don't be a fool. I'm a scamp; nothing can reform me. I don't want to be reformed. . . . Tune up, you damned fiddlers, tune up!"

He snapped his fingers, and shouted a few lines of his favourite ditty—

"'But I slipped my darbies one morn in May,
Fake away!
And gave the dubsman a holiday;
And here I am, pals, merry and free,
A regular rollicking rominy.
Nix my dolly, pals, fake away!'"

The band had again taken up the tune, and the dancers flung themselves into each others' arms, and capered and sang with an abandon that was tremendous.

To Ellaline the orgy had become a formless phantasmagoria. She fell, unconscious, happily caught by Eric Beryl, into whose loving eyes she gazed some minutes later. And Wood inviting him to drive with them to the Alderman's where they were staying for the night, Eric held her hand and kissed it fervently at parting.

"After all, the night may have been well spent," said Wood; "who knows?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BLUESKIN KEEPS HIS WORD

THE meeting with Ellaline at the "Shovels" seemed to have utterly demoralised Jack. He squandered in drink the balance of the money he had received from admiring visitors to Newgate; resisted Blueskin's efforts to hide him from pursuit; almost wore out the patience of Edgeworth Bess, who brought him warnings every hour of the movements of the constables. He showed himself publicly in his fine clothes, and boasted of his prowess.

In the disguise of a night-porter he called at Mr. Applebee's house in Blackfriars and left the following letters:—

"MR. APPLEBEE,—This with my kind love to you, and pray give my kind Love to Mr. Wagstaffe, hoping these few lines will find you in good Health as I am at present; but I must own you are the Loser for want of my Dying-Speech. But to make up your loss if you think this Sheet worth your while pray make

the best of it. Tho' they do say that I am taken among the Smugglers and put into Dover Castle, yet I hope I am among Smugglers still. So no more but

"Your Humble Servant,
"JACK SHEPPARD.

"And I desire you would be the Postman to my last Lodging, so farewell now I quit the English shore.
"Newgate Farewell."

This and the succeeding letter sufficiently demonstrate the fact insisted upon in these pages, that Jack Sheppard was a fairly educated youth. "Ignorance is the father of crime," said the moralist of those days; but Jack Sheppard is not the only example by thousands of a little learning being rather an incentive than a deterrent to criminal adventure, and that to be master of a handicraft that simplifies the use of chisels and pick-locks may be a further inducement to take up that "line of business" which Blueskin recommended to Mr. Wood's versatile apprentice.

"MR. AUSTIN,—You was pleas'd to pass your Jokes upon me and did say you should not have been angry with me had I took my leave of you; but now pray keep your Jokes to yourself; let them laugh that win: For now it is an equal Chance, you take me, or I get away, but I were Myself guilty of that ill Manners. Excuse me, for my departure being private which necessary spoiled the ceremony of bidding adieu. But I wish you all as well as I am at present. But Pray be not angry for the Loss of your Irons; had you not gave them me I had not taken them away; but really I had left them behind me had Convenience serv'd. So pray don't be Angry.

"Austin and Perry you both did Say
If ever Sheppard get away
You, in his Room, hang'd would be
Upon that Fatal Tyburn Tree
But that rash Vow I pray forsake

"Though Sheppard is so fortunate,
I would have you with Patience Wait
Till that again you do Him take,
For you are large and hevay Men,

"And two the Weight that was of him;
And if a Way to the Tree you take
Upon my word you'd make it Shake;
So Farewell now my leave I take.

"What's amiss done in this, please make good for my Scholarship is but small,

"From Your Fortunate Prisoner,
"JACK SHEPPARD."

A few days afterwards (within a week of his escape) he insisted upon Edgeworth Bess dining with him, and bringing a friend, at a tavern in Newgate Street, where they were very merry together. At four o'clock in the afternoon they took coach, and, drawing up the windows, drove past the great prison, and so to the "Sheers" alehouse, in Maypole Alley, by Clare Market; where, in the evening, hearing that his mother, whom he thought dead, was lodging in a queer ken in the neighbourhood, he sent for her, and treated her to three quarterns of brandy. She had sunk to the gutter, though once a handsome woman, and thought worthy of the envious wooing of Jonathan Wild. She advised her son to take himself off to some sure hiding-place; but he would listen to no counsel. He responded to the affectionate solicitude of Edgeworth Bess with maudlin professions of love. He vowed he feared neither Newgate nor the devil; neither one nor the other could hold him. Jonathan Wild, being apprised of the lad's whereabouts, put the constables on his track; and he was taken, without the smallest effort on the lad's part to resist arrest.

Once more in Newgate, he had more visitors than

ever. Under the prison discipline he recovered from his alcoholic madness, and was permitted to keep his fine clothes, and pose as a hero once more to ladies of quality and men of science and art, including Hogarth, Steele, Gay, and other celebrities; while Sir James Thornhill painted his portrait by order of the King. Jack's receptions were the fashion of the town, and he was encouraged to relate his adventures and experiences. He was full of high spirits. Money flowed into his coffers, most of which he handed to the jailors. While he jested with a free-and-easy indifference to his position, he, nevertheless, entreated Sir James Thornhill to intercede for him with the King. His most unhappy days were those on which Jonathan Wild was permitted to visit him. Jonathan gloated over the lad's approaching death, did not hesitate to tell him that nothing now could save him, that the government itself was pledged to his destruction, and that he, Jonathan Wild, would keep his word and see him in the hangman's hands at Tyburn. Blueskin, in disguise among the visitors, had heard Jonathan's boastings. Edgeworth Bess had obtained sufficient favour, through the interposition of Master Owen Wood, to see the prisoner. She had wept bitterly. Jack's mother was too debased and forlorn to leave the alley in which she had found her last hole of retreat from the world; and Jack, it must be admitted, cared little or nothing for her. She had been ouside his life for so many years that he had ceased to think of her. Indeed, truth to tell, the lad was incapable of any but very fitful sentiments of regard or affection. Wild had made an attempt to obtain the assistance of Blueskin in some scheme that was inimical to the interests of Wood and Beryl, and having in view an inquiry into the business of the lost papers belonging to the Brent and Waller estates; but Blueskin had met him with conditions that

involved the release of Sheppard, in regard to which they had come to angry words and Wild had threatened him with Tyburn.

"For the last time," said the thief-taker, "obey me, and you are safe; deny what I require, and you follow Sheppard in the cart, as sure as my name's Wild."

It was the morning appointed for the execution of Jack Sheppard when Master Owen Wood attended at Jonathan Wild's office, by appointment with Quilt Arnold. Quilt had just taken a packet of papers from one of Wild's secret drawers, not papers of any great moment; they were supplementary to those he had already placed in Wood's hands.

"Dead punctual," said Quilt, cheerfully, as he answered the door; "and keen as Wild himself on the right scent."

"Well, Master Quilt," said Wood, "a good day to you."

"And to you, sir. Papers ready; have secured the last of them only this minute."

"And I have the chief constable's written undertaking for your free pardon, whatever crime Jonathan Wild may charge you with, on the conviction of Wild, Blueskin, and the other persons named."

"I would like to see Blueskin pardoned."

"That may not be, I fear; but, if I have any interest with the authorities, he shall have an opportunity to leave the country."

"There, sir, are the remainder of the documents," said Quilt, handing over the papers. "You have kept your word with me; Wild never did; he'd promise, and when I asked for fulfilment, he would remind me that he held my life in his hands."

"Where is he?"

"Dressing in his best, to see Jack Sheppard hanged."

Wood looked round the room.

"He can't come in until I unlock the door."

"Quilt! Quilt! where are you?" Wild was now heard calling.

"You desired me to keep the private way closed," Quilt answered, going behind the screen, and unlocking the door.

"Quite right, quite right, Quilt," Wild answered, as he entered the room. "Ah, a good morrow to you, Master Wood. You are up betimes."

"I am on my way to Newgate, to say a last goodbye to Sheppard. It occurred to me you might have some merciful news to impart, a postponement of the sentence, perhaps, considering that the King himself has taken an interest in the unhappy lad."

"No, Master Wood. I could not help him, if I would: I would not, if I could. And where's the use? After his last daring escape—let us say his marvellous escape, from chain and staple, through barred ways, over walls protected with *chevaux de frise*, and with irons still upon his legs, my dear sir, an escape that will make his name famous for generations yet to come. But the idiot, to swagger into the streets within a week, here, there, and everywhere, a veritable lord of misrule, defying law and order and morality, sir, and all the town—to be informed upon by any fool that came along——"

"It was madness," said Wood.

"Madness, indeed! But vanity is madness. In his case, Master Wood, it was vanity. Who can help such a conceited idiot? Only the hangman! And, after all, he has well earned his fate."

"It is a terrible ending."

"Oh, I don't know. He goes out in a blaze of glory. Yes, sir, in a blaze! At this moment Sir James Thornhill is finishing his picture, and they tell me that the

famous Master Gay and Sir James's clever young assistant, Master Hogarth, are with him even now. There's distinction for you! If he had been a victorious general, he could not have been more highly honoured. And as for visitors—why, my dear sir, never since the days of Claude Duval has Newgate been so popular; ladies of the highest degree have kissed his hand."

"Is it so, indeed?"

"Truly is it; and he will be escorted to Tyburn by a troop of the King's Guards."

As he spoke there were trumpet calls, and immediately afterwards the sound of drums, shouts of people, and words of military command.

"There they go now, Master Wood," said Wild, opening a casement; "come and see them; there they go!"

Wood responded, sick at heart; and there peered in at the office door the face of Blueskin. Wild and Wood were at the window, and the marching of the troops and the beating of the drums came into the room strong and warlike.

"I know your game," said Blueskin, in a hoarse whisper. "Hide me, or I'll stab you!"

Quilt pointed to the screen. Blueskin crept thither.

"He's no longer my chief," said Quilt. "Do with him as it pleases you."

"Poor Jack!" said Wood, turning from the window. "A kindly hand at the right time might have saved him. But the penalty of sin is death. And be you never so secret, be sure your sins will find you out."

"The chaplain of Newgate has no doubt comforted Sheppard with those and other equally laudable Scripture truths, Master Wood."

"No doubt," said Wood. "Come, Master Quilt Arnold, if you are to be my escort."

"I have undertaken to conduct Master Wood through the crowd the back way," said Quilt to Wild.

"Very well, very well," Wild answered, again turning to the window, and rejoicing in the noise and bustle and importance of the crowd and the troops.

"We shall meet in the fatal stone-yard of the prison, Master Wild," said Wood.

"Be sure we shall, sir," answered Wild, "be sure we shall."

Quilt opened the door and stood aside while Wood went out: then followed him, turning to take a farewell look at Wild as he departed, his usual faint smile broadening into one of triumph.

"No escape this time," said Wild, as if apostrophising Jack Sheppard from the attitude of a spectator of one about to be hanged. "No escape through Joseph Blake being admitted to you in disguise, and handing you files and gimlets. And no rescue, Master Sheppard! The King's government comes to the help of the city. I told you I should hang you, Master Sheppard; I keep my word!"

While the jubilant thief-maker-and-taker was listening to the music of the troops and addressing the convict as if he had been present, Blueskin, with set lips and a gleam of hatred in his wicked eyes, was creeping silently towards him; his left hand forward, as if to seize him, his right grasping a long clasp-knife.

"And *I* keeps *my* word!" hissed Blueskin, as he clutched him from behind, his knee in his back, his left hand round his neck, his right seeking his throat. "And I keeps my word, Master Wild. If you scream they'll never hear you."

The drums beat the louder, as if to aid the assassin, and Wild's cry of terror died in his throat, which Blueskin was gripping with a grasp of iron. Wild fought

and struggled with desperation. He made no further effort to cry out, and Blueskin indulged in no further remarks. He found the murderous task he had set himself not so easy of execution as he expected. Wild nearly tripped him once, and had been able to seize the wrist of Blueskin's right hand so firmly that his assailant could not reach his throat with his knife, though sensible that he was half-strangling him.

The crowd shouted, the drums beat, the command of "Forward!" was given. The two men struggling for life and death heard it all, with strange distinctness. At last bending his head, Blueskin seized Wild's fingers in his teeth and bit them to the bone; whereupon with a gasp of agony Wild gave way, and Blueskin struck his knife into his throat and hacked at it viciously; at every tug the man groaning, until presently he fell limp in Blueskin's arms, and the murderer flung him to the ground.

After recovering his breath, Blueskin stooped and wiped the blade of his knife upon Wild's coat; then shutting the blade, put the weapon into his pocket. Standing with one leg over his bleeding victim, he drew a small bottle from his pocket and drank a long draught; then buttoned his coat, spat upon the prostrate ruffian, and walked boldly into the street.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE RECKONING

NEVER, probably, had the stone-yard of Newgate presented so gay a scene as on the last day of Jack Sheppard's imprisonment. Almost in the centre of the grim

apartment he may be said to have sat in state, the hero of the hour. It is true, he was chained to the floor, his wrists manacled. He could, however, move his hands sufficiently to assist himself, when he chose to drink from the flagon of wine that had been placed at his disposal. On the right-hand side of the room, almost hiding the iron-barred door that closed in upon his cell, Sir James Thornhill had set up his easel, and was at work. On the other side stood Hogarth, the poet Gay, and near the convict's chair the prize-fighter, Master Figg, whose chief weapon was the sword, though he could give a good account of himself with sword and dagger. He was a big, hulking-looking fellow, considerably scarred about the face; he had fought many battles. He was a great admirer of Jack, who, in presence of the distinguished company, challenged the man to mortal combat; and Figg asked Master Austin, the chief keeper, who was in attendance, for permission to have the encounter on the spot. This and other pleasantries passed to while away the time; for Hogarth, too, was sketching, and neither he nor Thornhill cared to be disturbed.

"Here's to his Majesty," said Jack, taking a long drink, "though he'd never have wanted my picture if I'd been honest."

"Yet honesty comes to prosperity and distinction as well as roguery, Master Sheppard," said the poet Gay.

"It has to be mighty smug if it does," Jack replied. "Oh, it's a dull business, being honest, Master Gay. My mother was honest, until she nearly died of starvation."

"Put that into your next poem, Master Gay," said Hogarth, "if it is not too realistic."

"Your servant, Master Gay," said Jack; "you are going to make a ballad on me?"

"An opera, belike," said Gay.

"I bespeak a box on the grand tier for the first night, sir. If I am unable to be present, I will ask you to transfer the ticket to Madame Edgeworth Bess——"

"I shall see that your wishes are respected, Master Sheppard."

"Perhaps, my dear friends Bill Horton and Mistress Dolly Cooke may accept Madame Edgeworth's hospitality on the occasion."

"Master Horton and Mistress Cooke were formally married the day after your escape, Master Sheppard," said Austin, "and sailed for France yesterday. Master Quilt Arnold called here this morning, and desired me to give you that interesting piece of news."

"Good luck to the married couple, and may the roads outside Paris be as fruitful of purses as those of London!" said Jack.

"But he has turned honest, Captain Sheppard, and the lady virtuous."

"Well, anything for a change, I suppose," Jack replied; and then, in an aside, he asked anxiously, "Has anything been heard of Bess?"

"No, Master Sheppard," said Austin.

"It is very strange," said Jack; and then, turning to the company, he assumed his previously cheerful manner. "And who has given you a commission, Master Hogarth; the princess, mayhap?"

"No, Master Sheppard," the sturdy draughtsman observed. "I shall hang you in my own parlour."

"After they have hanged me at Tyburn. Well, it's better to die famous as a cracksman than to be a poet and rot in a garret."

"The lad has wit as well as mechanical genius," said Hogarth to Gay.

"Let that be seen when you immortalise him in your projected 'Idle Apprentice,'" answered Gay.

"Prophet as well as poet, eh?" said Hogarth, closing his note-book.

"Talking of the prophetic," said Gay, "your prospective father-in-law keeps on as if he were painting his last, instead of the last of a fellow-creature."

A warder entered and spoke to Austin.

"Master Eric Beryl and Mistress Ellaline Wood, and Master Owen Wood, with a special order to see Captain Sheppard," said Austin.

"I cannot refuse to see them," said Jack, addressing Sir James. "I have declined all leave-taking in my private room. Don't you think I am right, Sir James?"

"No doubt," said Sir James, plodding away at his picture.

"I've stood so much moralising and good advice from the ordinary at Newgate that I determined to have none of it from my friends. A fellow dies a dozen times by too much thinking of the single event; for, do what you may, you can only die once, and death has to come to all of us sooner or later. To you, too, Sir James, and to dapper Master Gay and jolly Master Hogarth. But by Jupiter and the ploughman, you'll talk of this day when you're old; you'll boast that you knew Jack Sheppard."

Any reply that might have been made was interrupted by the entrance of Wood, his daughter, and Eric Beryl.

"You have come," said Jack. "Well, Sir James has nearly finished; you won't disturb him. He's been at this game for a whole week; so fond of my society."

"We found it as hard to come as to stay away," said Ellaline, doing her best to maintain a steady voice and manner.

"Come to say goodbye? Well, my hand will be freer in a little while; but I dare say you'll make shift to take it."

The girl bent her head and burst into tears. "Goodbye, Jack, goodbye!"

"Nay, don't cry," he said; "it only upsets me."

"My poor dear friend," the girl murmured.

"Dry your eyes," the lad answered, his voice trembling in spite of himself. "It takes me all my time to forget the old shop in Wych Street and the pretty face at the window, and" (turning to Eric) "dear old moral Eric. Let me kiss your hand, Ellaline." (She put her hand to his lips.) "It does me good to know that I did something towards saving Eric, and perhaps helped him to his name and property——"

"Our Eric is in very truth Sir Thomas Waller now, or, as he prefers to call himself, Sir Eric," said Wood, taking part in the conversation; "and the estates and title of Brent, too, have come to him with the death of Sir Patrick Brent."

"That is good news indeed," said Jack. "May you be very happy, Sir Eric!"

The lad turned once more to Ellaline, who had gone down upon her knees by his chair, the better to converse with him, which she did in a low and tearful voice.

"They say there are dreams after death," he said, looking down into her streaming eyes; "if there be, I shall dream of Wych Street, hear the music of the joiner's plane, and see you, Ellaline—and see you." One of the few tears he had ever shed fell upon her hand.

"Dear Jack, we have done our best to have your sentence reprieved, and even hoped to do more. But oh, my dear friend, make your peace with God!"

"As one makes one's bed, so one must lie upon it," the lad replied. "I was born a scamp, Eric" (he looked from Ellaline to Eric and Wood), "and it's no use denying it; 'born in sin and shapen in iniquity'; but let's make the best of a bad job. Goodbye, Ellaline; goodbye, Eric; goodbye, Master Wood."

"Goodbye," they said, one after the other. Ellaline

kissed the lad's manacled hands, and had to be led away, which tender office Eric performed.

The moment they had disappeared, Jack exclaimed, "Austin and good friends all" (several prison officials by this time had joined the group, and there was heard the massing of troops in the courtyard), "no more misery; no more leave-taking; poor Bess cannot come, else she'd have been here." He took up his flagon, and, lifting it awkwardly, exclaimed, "Away with sighing and sorrow. Here's success to bravery, and God save the King!"

And he thereupon sung a snatch of the ballad, "Here's a health to the King and a lasting peace," followed by the gruesome ditty of Captain Hind—"When Captain Hind got into the cart, no braver man than he"—and almost upon the words, after a brief altercation among the officials at the main entrance, Edgeworth Bess came panting in, flinging herself down at the lad's feet.

"Oh, my dear lad! I thought I should never see you again. Oh, my poor dear! I've brought you a nosegay; got it of a gardener." She proceeded to fasten upon his bosom a hot-house rose; for the month, as you need not be reminded, was November.

"This is the woman who calls herself his wife," said Gay to Hogarth.

"A handsome woman once, besotted now," said Hogarth, who straightway made a rapid sketch of her, which proved useful to him many a year afterwards.

"But oh, Jack, and you, kind gentlemen, I wanted most to tell him that his enemy is dead—his great enemy, all the world's enemy! It come of my calling to get an order; and it was Blueskin, they say, as did it; but perhaps Wild tried to kill him. He was by himself, Jonathan was, and Blueskin took him by the throat, and it was as if the jackal had turned on the lion and rended

him, and the drums beat and nobody heard his cry as he fell dead—dead—dead !"

The woman, worn out with excitement, fell prone upon the stones ; and, to the surprise of all who had heard the tragic story, Wild himself staggered in, white to the lips, a blood-stained bandage about his throat, his eyes sunken. He was leaning upon the arm of a warder.

"Not dead—no, my dear," he said, in a sepulchral, harsh voice ; "not so dead as Jack."

Jack's head drooped ; Edgeworth Bess looked aghast.

It was Wood's turn now. Quilt had not dared to indulge himself in any possible scheme of vengeance. He had gone straightway home to his sister, and they had sat down and wept tears of joy ; so strange are the contrasts in the battle of life.

"Not dead, Master Wild," said Wood, who had taken leave of his daughter and Eric in order to see the last of his unhappy apprentice before he took steps against Wild. "Not dead, sir. For your own sake, and the world's, 'twould have been better if you had never been born."

"Why for the world's sake?—why for mine?" murmured Wild, in a painful whisper.

"Because," pointing to the governor of Newgate, "you are this gentleman's prisoner ; and the world has rarely seen a greater villain."

"On what charge?"

"Murders, misdemeanours, and other crimes," said the governor.

"Ah, ah ! Caught at last !" exclaimed Jack, eagerly aroused. "I shall die happy after all."

"I will not stay here to be publicly insulted," gasped Wild, making a staggering and painful effort to move.

"You will remain to be handcuffed and ironed," said the governor. "Officer, take him in charge."

An officer stepped forward, and in another moment, despite his sighs and groans and the bleeding of his wounds, he was bound; an unnecessary precaution, but an indignity that gave satisfaction to most of those who were present. By this time the procession of officials and dignitaries began to enter the stone-yard, and the arms of the guardsmen could be seen glittering at the back of the imposing assemblage.

"You'll not let him see me in the cart?" exclaimed Jack, noticing that Wild was at once removed.

"No, Sheppard," said the governor; "he goes to your cell."

"Ah, ah, ah!" laughed Jack, raising himself as far as possible in his chair. "Ah, ah! You'll be hanged, Jonathan. The ordinary will tell you of your sins, as if anybody that ever lived could do that. You're doomed, Jonathan; you're doomed, and you'll never die game; you'll crawl, and pray, and beg, and cry, and they'll drag you to the cart. Ah, ah, ah!"

Jack was almost beside himself with a mad, delirious joy. He pointed with his manacled hands, as Jonathan was removed to the cells. "To hell, Jonathan; there's no other place for you! You made men thieves, and murdered them afterwards! Fiend, beast, devil!"

"Close ranks!" was heard, and the sound of arms upon the stones; and there entered Marvel, the executioner, his sleeves turned up, a belt about his waist, and behind him the sheriffs in their robes, the ordinary in his gown, and Austin and his assistants.

The bell of St. Sepulchre began to toll.

"Marvel, the executioner," said Hogarth to Gay.

"He looks his trade," said Gay to Hogarth.

Marvel bowed to the company, and a warder conducted Edgeworth Bess from the yard.

"Good morning to you, Master Sheppard," said the

executioner. "If it is agreeable, the blacksmith shall relieve you of your irons."

A blacksmith, in leathern apron and with a bag of tools, stood forward.

"And if it is not agreeable, Master Marvel, you'll relieve me all the same."

"It is the pleasantest part of my duty," said Marvel. "Take my hand. Your right leg first."

Jack put up his foot upon the stone, and the blacksmith went to work. After one or two pleasantries between Jack and Marvel, Jack stood free from his shackles, though a little later and he would be bound with cords, on the way to the Triple Tree, about which he sang so defiantly.

"By St. George!" he said, "I feel that I'd like to dance. . . . And I shall soon. . . . Upon nothing! . . . Rather hard, Master Wood, so young!"

Every one could see how valiantly the lad strove to be brave, and take his punishment in keeping with his daring career.

"My poor fellow," said Wood, with trembling lips. "Goodbye!"

Military commands resounded through the corridors. There was a movement in the entrance hall. The murmurs of a vast crowd could be heard.

"Now, Master Sheppard," said Marvel; and Jack stepped into his place.

"Forward! March!" cried the commander of the guard. Boom! boom! went St. Sepulchre's bell, followed by a flourish of trumpets.

As the daylight now streamed in upon Jack and the fresh air beat upon his face, he paused a moment, and in a clear voice said, "Old St. Sepulchre's bell isn't much in the way of music; why don't they ring a peal? I always liked a peal." Then he burst out singing—

"'In the box of a stone jug I was born,
Of a hempen widow, all forlorn.
Fake away!'"

The great procession moved beyond the precincts of the prison into a mighty crowd, that surged to and fro with neither cheer nor groan; but many shouted, "Good-bye, Jack." "God bless you, Jack." "Brave old pal." "Heaven take you, Jack."

All the time the bell tolled, and Jack sung, and snapped his fingers as he carolled his favourite ditty; but in sight of the Tree his manner changed and he appeared to realise his terrible situation. . . . And so, at last, the end came, on Monday, November the 14th, 1724, in the 23rd year of his age. . . . "He died with great difficulty and much pitied by the mob," runs the simple record of the Newgate historian. "When he had been dead fifteen minutes he was cut down by a soldier and delivered to his friends. They carried him to the 'Barley Mow,' in Long Acre, and he was buried the same evening in St. Martin's Church-yard."

THE END
PROPERTY
OF
YORK
LIBRARY